Sri Sarada Devi
The Holy Mother

Her Teachings and Conversations

Life by
Swami Tapasyananda

Translated with Notes by Swami Nikhilananda
a direct disciple of Holy Mother

SRI SARADA DEVI

The Holy Mother At Fifty-Two

SRI SARADA DEVI

THE HOLY MOTHER

(HER LIFE AND CONVERSATIONS)

Life by
SWAMI TAPASYANANDA
Conversations translated by
SWAMI NIKHILANANDA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH
MYLAPORE, MADRAS (INDIA)
1958

Published by
THE PRESIDENT
SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH
MYLAPORE, MADRAS

Third Edition
All Rights Reserved
XXII—2—1958

Printed
at the Vasanta Press,
The Theosophical Society,
Adyar, Madras 20.

PREFACE

ALTHOUGH it is now nearly two decades since the passing away of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, no comprehensive work on her life and teachings has appeared in English. The present work, comprising her biography and conversations, seeks to remedy this want and present in one volume everything about the Holy Mother—her life as well as her teachings.

The first part of the book, entitled *The Life of the Holy Mother*, is a new writing and not a translation, although it incorporates in itself all relevant biographical material from existing literature in Bengali,[1] besides information gathered from such of the Holy Mother's disciples as had lived closely with her and could therefore speak with authority on the various aspects of her life and character. Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma, the best authorities on her early life, are now no more, and all that could be done for gathering materials about this part of her life was to depend on existing literature and on the testimony of those who had heard about it from these two close companions of the Holy Mother. Concerning the later part of her life, however, there are yet many living authorities

[1] See Appendix 3. Bibliography.

to give first-hand information. Most of them are monks of the Ramakrishna Order, while the others are those few lady disciples of the Holy Mother who had the privilege of staying with her and serving her in her last days.

Judged by purely objective standards, the Holy Mother's life may look very simple and uneventful, and one may doubt whether it provides a fitting theme at all for the historian to work upon. A contemporary of many a great spiritual luminary of the past, with the figures of the big potentates and military leaders of the time looming large in his eyes, might also have felt in the same way if called upon to record the lives of those men whom the world has in later times come to recognize as the salt of humanity. But greatness of the highest type is to be measured not in terms of the political, economic or military values of a life for the moment, but in terms of the character potential it embodies. When considered in this light, the Holy Mother, who was wife, nun, mother and teacher in one, is an arresting figure in the history of mankind, and it is our conviction that through her simple life and character a unique ideal has been revealed to mankind—an ideal which, in spite of its artless simplicity, is dynamic enough to transform the lives of men and women who approach it in the right attitude of mind.

In recounting the events of her life, our aim has been to give an interpretative study of it, bringing into prominence this ideal, which we have described

by different expressions as the Eternal Feminine, the Divine Motherhood and the Madonna Ideal. In other words we have tried to view the life of the Holy Mother as the expression of a great spiritual principle.

The second part of this book, entitled *Conversations of the Holy Mother*, is the translation of the two Bengali volumes called *Mayer Katha*. We are very grateful to Swami Nikhilananda of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York, for having translated them for us, and we take this opportunity to draw the reader's attention to the valuable note he has added at the beginning of the *Conversations*. As we had to limit the size of the book to less than six hundred pages, we could not include in it the whole translation. About a third of it had to be omitted, while nearly one-tenth of it, consisting mainly of passages where the Holy Mother narrates the facts of her life, has been incorporated in the biography. Barring a few exceptions, the passages in direct narration occurring in the biographical section, are extracts from these conversations. In spite of abridgement, the second part contains all the important portions of the conversations given in the two volumes of *Mayer Katha*. The first two chapters of it set forth the two main series of conversations, while the third contains portions of special interest selected from the eliminated sections. Sufficient care has been taken to see that the elimination

effected has not in any way impaired the spirit of these charming conversations, or excluded any section having a vital bearing on the elucidation of any spiritual idea, or revelation of any new trait of character.

These conversations contain many important spiritual instructions, but the major part of them is more interesting from the point of view of the personality and the biographical situations they depict. In fact, what we have given in general terms in the biography is concretely illustrated in the situations depicted in the conversations. Thus the two parts of the book form an integral whole and are mutually complementary. There may, however, be some readers who are interested in the spiritual instructions as such, and in order that they may easily pick out such portions excluding the rest, we have given inset notes only to such passages in the second part as are significant from this point of view. The Index also will help one to select passages of this type.

It is hoped that the general public would feel interested in this volume, both from a religious and a cultural point of view, and find impressively depicted in the life of this great daughter of Mother India, many of those cherished values that have been created and conserved by the womanhood of this country in the course of its age-long history.

Madras
October, 1940

PUBLISHER

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	PREFACE	v
	BOOK I	
	LIFE OF THE HOLY MOTHER	
I.	Ancestry	3
II.	Birth and Education	7
III.	Marriage	12
IV.	Visit to Dakshineswar	23
V.	The Fiery Ordeal	32
VI.	The Ascent to Motherhood	40
VII.	At the Feet of the Master	47
VIII.	In the Service of the Master	57
IX.	In the Passing of Events	88
X.	The Master's Demise and After	102
XI.	Pilgrimage to Brindavan	111
XII.	Life at Kamarpukur and After	120
XIII.	In the Setting of Domestic Life	132
XIV.	Her Spiritual Ministry	161
XV.	Glimpses of her Personality	196
XVI.	More Pilgrimages	228
XVII.	Her Later Life	238
XVIII.	Her Message	270
XIX.	The End	284

BOOK II

CONVERSATIONS OF THE HOLY MOTHER

CHAP.		PAGE
	TRANSLATOR'S NOTE . .	297
XX.	Conversations: First Series *From the Diary of a Woman Disciple*	301
XXI.	Conversations: Second Series *From the Diary of a Monastic Disciple*	406
XXII.	Conversations: Third Series *From the Diaries of Several Disciples, Monastic and Lay* . . .	513

APPENDICES:

1.	Chronology	561
2.	The Horoscope of the Holy Mother .	563
3.	Bibliography	565

INDEX AND GLOSSARY . . . 569

ILLUSTRATIONS

		PAGE
1.	The Holy Mother at Fifty-two .	*Frontispiece*
2.	Sri Ramakrishna in a High State of Yoga	*to face* 55
3.	The Nahabat . . .	„ 57
4.	The Holy Mother at the Age of Forty-five. Taken by Mrs Sarah Bull, an American Disciple of Swami Vivekananda, referred to on page 438 . . .	„ 132
5.	The Holy Mother at Fifty-eight .	„ 197
6.	The Udbodhan Office . .	„ 222
7.	Swami Yogananda . . .	„ 252
8.	Swami Saradananda . .	„ 252
9.	Yogin-Ma	„ 256
10.	Golap-Ma	„ 256
11.	Lakshmi-Didi . . .	„ 263
12.	Gauri-Ma	„ 263

BOOK I
LIFE OF THE HOLY MOTHER

CHAPTER I

ANCESTRY

ABOUT sixty miles to the west of Calcutta, on the south-eastern border of the Bankura District, is situated the little hamlet of Jayrambati, the native village of the Holy Mother. The rivulet Amodar, a perennial stream of transparent waters, meanders its way along the northern boundary of the village. Today, thanks to railroad and motor traffic, a night's journey is enough to reach Jayrambati from Calcutta. But at the time to which our narrative refers, it was much more inaccessible, since one had to travel for more than two days either on foot or in a palanquin, passing through fields and wildernesses infested by robbers.

Compared with some of the adjoining villages, Jayrambati, with not more than a hundred little mud houses in it, must be considered small. Its soil, however, was fairly rich, and an industrious peasantry raised in it a variety of crops, consisting chiefly of paddy, potatoes and vegetables of various kinds. While self-sufficient in the matter of staple foodstuffs, the village had no bazaar or fairs, and its inhabitants had, therefore, to depend on bigger

villages of the neighbourhood like Kotalpur, Koyapat and Kamarpukur—all within six miles of it—for the purchase of several necessaries of life like cloth, and for the marketing of the surplus products of their fields. In spite of its backwardness, life in it was fairly happy before the ravages of malaria carried misery into its homes in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The monotony of the villagers' life was frequently relieved by the public celebrations of the great Hindu festivals like Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Dol Purnima and the rest, and by the special worship of various deities, be it of Sitala or of Dharma, of Santinath, the Siva image of the neighbouring village of Sihor or of Simhavahini, the Mother deity of Jayrambati itself.

In a population consisting mainly of agriculturists and artisans, the village had only two Brahmin families, the Banerjis and the Mukherjis. The Holy Mother was a daughter of the Mukherji family. Her father Ramachandra Mukherji had three younger brothers—Trailokya Nath, a scholar well-versed in Sanskrit, who met with premature death, and Isvar Chandra, and Nilmadhav who remained a lifelong celibate. All the brothers lived as a joint family.

Ramachandra was a poor man, but he was virtuous, upright, and an example of the Brahminical ideal. "My father", said the Holy Mother in later days, "was a very good man. He was a great devotee of Rama. He had unswerving devotion to the ideal of a Brahmin's life. He could not accept gifts

indiscriminately. He loved to smoke, and as he smoked—he was so simple and humble—he would address in a friendly way every passer-by that crossed his door and say cordially, 'Come in, brother. Have a smoke.' "

We come across a remarkable instance of Ramachandra's generosity and goodness when Bengal was in the grip of a terrible famine in 1864. Ramachandra was himself a poor man, making a meagre living from the cultivation of a few acres of paddy fields, the performance of priestly duties, and the making of sacred threads. He had none the less a good stock of paddy from the surplus of the previous year's produce, and without any consideration of his own worldly circumstances, he spent it all in feeding the famine-stricken.

Recounting her impression of this event, which took place in her tenth year, the Holy Mother said to her disciples in later days : " At one time a terrible famine devastated Jayrambati. People without number would come to our house for food. We had a store of rice from the previous year's produce. My father made Khichuri, cooking that rice and pulse together. The Khichuri used to be kept in a number of pots. All the members of the family would take only that Khichuri. The starving people would also eat the same. He would, however, say, 'A little plain rice of good variety shall be cooked for my daughter Sarada, (*i.e.* the Holy Mother herself). She will eat that.' Sometimes the starving

people would come in such large numbers that the food would not be sufficient for them. Then new Khichuri would be cooked, and when the hot stuff was poured in large earthen pots, I would fan and make it cool. People with hungry stomachs would be waiting for it. One day a low class girl came there. She had shaggy hair and blood-shot eyes like those of a lunatic. She saw the rice dust soaking in a tub for the cattle and at once started eating it. We said to her, 'There is Khichuri inside the house, go and eat it', but she was too impatient to wait. Is it a joke to bear the agony of an empty stomach?"

Ramachandra had for his partner in life a woman fully worthy of him. His wife Syamasundari Devi,—the daughter of Hari Prasad Mazumdar of Sihor—besides being a strongly built and industrious woman and an able housewife, was also imbued with the same high ideals as her husband. "She was", according to the Holy Mother, "very simple, guileless and compassionate." She was devoted to the Deity, and it was her nature always to feel delighted in feeding people and working for their good. In later days when her daughter's circle of devotees increased, she used to love and welcome them with great affection. "My mother", said the Holy Mother, "used to be so pleased when any one of the devotees came to our place. She would exclaim, 'Ah! my grandchild has come!' She would look after them with great attention. She looked upon this family of devotees as her own flesh and blood."

CHAPTER II

BIRTH AND EDUCATION

SRI SARADA DEVI,[1] the Holy Mother, was born as the eldest child of her devoted parents on the 22nd of December, 1853. Born and brought up in the rural atmosphere of Jayrambati, her early training was just like that of any poor village girl of India belonging to the higher castes. Ever since she was a little girl, she helped her mother in cooking, and often when the latter could not attend to it for unavoidable reasons, she used to take her place in the kitchen. Referring to these experiences of her early days, the Holy Mother used to say, "I cooked and my father helped me to take down the big rice pot from the oven." As to the other types of work she was accustomed to do, she said, "In my childhood I sometimes used to go into neck-deep water and cut grass for the cows. I carried tiffin to the labourers in the field. During one season the paddy was destroyed by pests, and I had to collect the grain from one field after another."

As a girl she was too serious and self-composed to give herself up to childish games like others of her

[1] The name given to her according to astrological calculation was Thakurmani.

age. Aghormani, a companion and playmate of her girlhood, used to say of her: "Mother was very simple in her habits. She would never quarrel with anybody while playing. When others fell out, she would mediate and establish cordial relations. In play she used to personate herself either as the mistress or governess of the house. Among her playthings there were some dolls, but she was more interested in the clay images of Kali and Lakshmi which she devoutly worshipped with flowers and Bilva leaves. Once on the occasion of the Jagaddhatri Puja, she was meditating on the Goddess with such deep concentration and sense of identification with Her, that the sight of it struck awe in the mind of Ramhriday Ghoshal of Haldepukur."

Much of her time was taken up with looking after her own younger brothers. Sometimes she went with them to the village school, but since a literary education was not considered quite a necessary accomplishment for a village girl in those days, no one seemed to have taken any trouble to teach her or ensure her regular attendance at school. She had, however, a keen desire to study, and in later days learned to read by her own efforts. Referring to this, she said, "Lakshmi[1] and I used to read the Bengali primer a little at Kamarpukur. My nephew Hriday[2] snatched the book away from me.

[1] A niece of Sri Ramakrishna.

[2] A nephew of Sri Ramakrishna and a constant companion and attendant of his for a long time.

He said, 'Women should not learn to read and write. Are you preparing yourself in this way to read novels and dramas later on?' But Lakshmi did not give up the book. She belonged to the family; therefore she held on to her book. I too secretly had a copy bought for one anna. Lakshmi used to attend the village school. On returning home she would teach me. But I really improved my capacity to read only long after at Dakshineswar. The Master (*i.e.* Sri Ramakrishna) was staying then at Syampukur for treatment. I was all alone. A girl belonging to the family of Bhava Mukherji used to come to the temple-garden to bathe in the Ganges. Now and then she would spend a long time with me. She used to give me lessons and afterwards examine me. And in return, I would give her a large quantity of greens, vegetables and other articles of food that were sent to me from the temple-garden."

Though she knew quite well how to read, she never mastered the art of writing. In later days a disciple wanted to have an autograph from her, and she agreed in a way. But in a vain effort to write her own name, she scrawled and scrawled, and being unable to produce anything readable, gave up the attempt.

It should not be understood from the above that the rural surroundings of her early days did not provide her with any facilities for education. In India, culture has never been identified with literacy.

The Indian mind has devised methods of its own for the training of the head and the heart and for an unconscious assimilation of the nation's highest ideals, without unduly emphasizing the pedagogue's art. The religious life of the family, the atmosphere of self-abnegation and service in which girls grow up, the temple festivals, the recitals of epics, village dramas, devotional narratives,—these and several other factors of a like nature provide even women, who live a comparatively isolated life, with facilities for developing a unified character undistracted by the conflicting thoughts and ideals that flow into the minds of the literate through the productions of commercialized publishing houses.

The Holy Mother had plenty of opportunity to receive the training that such an environment provided. As we have seen, Jayrambati and its neighbourhood were not without religious festivals. Yatra performances (a form of devotional drama) were frequent in those times, and she had occasion to attend many of them. In her instructions to disciples the Holy Mother used to quote verses and aphorisms that had been imprinted on her memory by attending such performances in her early days. What was more, the care and contact of her poor but cultured and devoted parents were an educational facility of no mean importance. That the Holy Mother was powerfully impressed by them is plain from the great regard and appreciation with which she always spoke of them in later days.

And above all, she had, in her early girlhood, the rare good fortune of coming in contact with a great soul in the most intimate relationship of a woman's life—a contact which in time helped her to understand and realize the purpose of education in the highest sense.

CHAPTER III

MARRIAGE

IT is generally said that every girl in India is born for marriage. This is largely true with regard to modern Hindu society. A daughter is often felt a liability and burden, and parents do not finally feel relieved in respect of her until she has been given away in marriage. The feeling of the Indian mind on this point has been beautifully expressed by Kalidasa, the great Sanskrit poet and dramatist, in a verse he puts into the mouth of Rishi Kanva, the foster-father of Sakuntala, when his daughter leaves for her husband's home: "Verily, a daughter is the property of another man. Today, having sent her to her husband, my conscience has become quite clear, as if on restoring a deposit after a long time"[1] (*Sakuntala*, IV, 151).

It cannot be denied that this way of thinking has often led parents to hurry their daughters into the matrimonial bond even at a premature age. It is

[1] अर्थो हि कन्या परकीय एव तामद्य सम्प्रेष्य परिग्रहीतुः ।
जातोऽस्मि सद्यो विशदान्तरात्मा चिरस्य निक्षेपमिवार्पयित्वा ॥

perhaps the very same mentality, buttressed by quasi-religious theories, that has crystallized into such practices as early marriage and child marriage, enforced by social compulsion. That this was not so in the early history of Hindu society is clear from the fact that just like boys, girls also used to be educated in 'forest universities', some of which at least were run on co-educational lines. In fact, the theory of compulsory pre-puberty marriage for girls of the higher castes came into popularity only along with a change in the conception of women's education. In early Aryan society—and it is also recognized by the orthodox Smritis—girls, like boys, were invested with the sacred thread at the proper age and subsequently initiated into Vedic study and Aryan religious life.[1] How long their education continued, one cannot say, but modern scholars believe that marriage did not come in the way of it in so far as the Vedic hymns chanted and the marriage rituals and practices followed indicate that both the contracting parties were adults.

[1] The condition that existed in Aryan society in early days is well reflected in the following verse from the Smriti of Yama.

पुराकल्पे कुमारीणां मौञ्जीबन्धनमिष्यते ।
अध्यापनञ्च वेदानां सावित्रीवचनं तथा ॥

"In former ages girls were invested with the sacred thread (Upanayana). They could teach the Vedas and repeat the Savitri Mantra."

This verse, however, could not be found in the present editions of Yama's Smriti that we consulted. But it is quoted by Madhavacharya, an author of great standing in orthodox circles, in his commentary on Parasara Samhita (Cf. p. 83

A time, however, came in later days when the investiture of girls with the sacred thread came to be abandoned. This change of ritual procedure, though apparently simple, was fraught with immense consequences in the educational and matrimonial life of women. The investiture with the sacred thread was, for the Aryan mind, the symbol of the commencement of Brahmacharya, or the period of education. And also, only a person invested with it was entitled to Vedic study and Vedic religious practices. The abandonment of it in the case of

Bombay Sanskrit Series Edition). Madhava's purpose in quoting it is only to discourage Upanayana at present by pointing out that such concessions were applicable only to the distant ages of the past (Kalpas) according to Puranic computations. But to a mind endowed with a historical sense it is a positive proof of the full educational and religious equality allowed to women. It is also known from ancient literature that women performed Vedic sacrificial rites like men. (See *Ramayana* II, where Kausalya performs Svasti Yaga alone, and *Ibid.*, II, 88, 18-19 and V, 15, 48 where Sita twice discloses her discharging religious duties in the morning and evening like men.) Even Jaimini quotes Badarayana to show that women could perform Vedic sacrifices. Now the recognition of this automatically presupposed investiture with the sacred thread and Vedic education.

According to Altekar (*Vide* his *Women in Hindu Civilization*) women enjoyed these religious privileges more or less till the beginning of the Christian era. But changes were gradually coming in. At 500 B.C., as we may gather from Harita, a few women (Brahmavadinis) made an intensive study of the Vedas after Upanayana while the majority of girls (Sadyo-vadhus) underwent the formality of the ceremony shortly before marriage. The Brahmavadinis did not marry but followed the ascetic life. Many centuries later Manu (*Manusmriti*, II, 66) favoured women's Upanayana without the reciting of Vedic Mantras. Still later writers like Yajnavalkya (200 A.D.) advocated the more straightforward course of prohibiting the ceremony altogether. It is interesting to note in this connection that among the Parsis (Zoroastrians), a branch of the ancient Vedic Aryans, the ceremony is still performed for girls.

woman, therefore, meant her exclusion from the ancient Aryan system of education, the chief characteristics of which were the study of the Vedas and residence in the teacher's house during one's educational career.

It may, however, be asked whether the Hindu law-givers of later days totally overlooked the educational needs of girls and wanted to reduce them to the position of ignorant domestic slaves. This was far from their intention. What they contemplated was that for woman marriage would take the place of the ceremony of investiture with the sacred thread (*Manu*, II, 67), and that instead of going to a Guru for study, she would have her education at the hands of her own husband. As investiture with the sacred thread took place in early boyhood, so too the marriage of girls was to take place before they reached the age of puberty. The idea behind it was this. A boy could absorb the ideals of his teacher and have his character moulded by his influence, only if he was put under him at an impressionable age, that is, in his early boyhood. So also it was argued that a girl could become one in mind with her husband, and participate whole-heartedly in his ideals and aspirations, only if she was brought under the influence of his personality at a tender age, before her individuality was formed and hardened in its distinctiveness by experiences and contacts of pre-marital life. The husband generally was an adult who had completed

his long period of Brahmacharya, or education combined with moral and spiritual training, and the first obligation that marriage placed on him was the education of his wife, that of being the father of her progeny coming only next.

This is the ideal underlying the custom of marrying girls in their childhood. But ideals do not always tally with realities, and the system of child marriage, too, has not been an exception to this. The attainments that the system at its best presupposes in the bridegroom are beyond what we may expect in ordinary social life. A bridegroom, according to it, must practically be a sage who has overcome his animal propensities, and is capable of viewing his wife more as a soul in formation than as a member of the opposite sex. Such men are few and far between, and in consequence the vast majority of marriages contracted under the system seldom produce those ideal conditions presupposed by it. Of course, when the joint family was a living institution, and the young had the advantage of intelligent guidance from their parents and elders, the evils of the system were much mitigated. In spite of all that, in the vast majority of cases, it has stood in the way of women's education, and driven girls to the ordeal of motherhood at too premature an age.

But the ideal has its possibilities. Given suitable conditions, it is capable of producing results that compel one's recognition. This is what one finds

in the life of the Holy Mother. Here is an example of a girl of five being married to a youth of twenty-three. But the youth was a sage and a great teacher, and the girl a fit recipient of noble teachings. As a consequence we find in their lives a new ideal of conjugal life being evolved—an ideal in which the carnal side of human nature is completely eliminated and the husband plays the part of a spiritual teacher, transferring the richest experiences of his life to the wife, who, in her turn becomes a life-long disciple, finding the highest fulfilment of her life in serving her husband, in absorbing his teachings, and in continuing his life-work after him.

The study of the Holy Mother's life is the study of the gradual unfoldment of this great principle. The circumstances that led to the singular marriage of the Holy Mother, which facilitated these developments, are given below.

While little Sarada was growing up at Jayrambati assisting her mother in her domestic duties, the great soul whose partner in life she was to become, was passing through a remarkable period of spiritual development in another part of the country. Born in 1836 as the third son of Khudiram Chatterji of Kamarpukur in the District of Hoogly, Sri Ramakrishna had become the priest of Kali at the temple of Dakshineswar in the year 1855. From his very boyhood he was highly devotional and mystical in temperament. Subsequent to his appointment as priest, his duties in the temple kindled his devotion

until it became an irresistible passion for the realization of the Divine. He lost interest in worldly life, and began to spend all his time in a state of absorption and in the practice of austerities. In course of time it became impossible for him even to attend to his duties in the temple, and in the end he had to be relieved from his priestly work, so that he might be left entirely to the pursuit of his divine quest. And he spent his time in constant prayer and contemplation, forgetting even food and sleep and almost unaware of the passing of day and night.

Naturally, people who knew not what longing for God was, interpreted the strange behaviour of Sri Ramakrishna as evidence of madness. This distorted information gradually reached the ears of his mother Chandra and his brother Ramesvar in their village home at Kamarpukur. So in the year 1858 they had him brought to the village, but they were grieved to find that he had developed an indifference to the world, a mood of apathy for external happenings, and a restless hankering for some unseen reality, which expressed itself occasionally in piteous cries of 'Mother! Mother!' The neighbours began to whisper that he was possessed by an alien spirit. So methods of exorcism were tried, but the spirits invoked denied that he had any physical or mental malady. Probably Sri Ramakrishna had some vivid experiences of the Divine during this period, and as a consequence his relatives soon noticed an abatement of his disquieting symptoms. Even without any

remedy, occult or medical, he became quieter and his boyish gaiety and old habit of neighbourliness returned. But his indifference to worldly life and strange habits, such as meditation in the solitude of the cremation ground, persisted. As these habits were natural with him from boyhood, they were not interpreted as being of any serious consequence.

This, no doubt, brought a sense of relief to Chandra and Ramesvar, but they did not feel secure until something was done to render the recovery permanent. After consultations, they decided upon a final and drastic remedy. They would arrange for Sri Ramakrishna's marriage.[1] For it was thought that a loving wife and the responsibility of a family would be the best means to tie his mind to worldly life and its prospects.

So Sri Ramakrishna's mother and brother set out at once to find out a suitable bride, but this was by no means an easy task. Their family was poor, and the amounts demanded as bridal money by most of the parents with marriageable girls were much beyond the means of Ramesvar Chatterji. They had begun this matrimonial quest without Sri Ramakrishna's knowledge; for they expected rebellious protests from him if he were informed. But strange to say, when the news reached his ears in course of time, he expressed ready acquiescence. And what was more, on seeing his mother and brother sad at

[1] The pre-puberty marriage prevalent among the Hindus which is a mere betrothal but religiously and legally valid.

the frustration of all their efforts to find a suitable bride, he said to them one day in an inspired mood, "Vain is your search in this place and that. Go to Jayrambati and there, in the house of Ramachandra Mukherji, you will find her who is marked out for me."[1]

Though little relying on it, they took up the suggestion, and made enquiries at Ramachandra's house. Ramachandra was found willing to give his daughter Sarada in marriage, but the bridegroom's party at first felt some hesitation, as the girl was only a little child of five, and Sri Ramakrishna was past twenty-three then. Any way, since no better match could be arranged, they had to accept the offer, and before long the marriage of little Sarada with Sri Ramakrishna took place in May, 1859[2] at the bride's paternal house in Jayrambati. The bride was then brought to Kamarpukur, four miles to the west of Jayrambati. Ramesvar Chatterji paid a

[1] There is another tradition regarding the marriage. Once, when the Holy Mother was only two years old, she was taken by her mother to Sihor to witness a temple festival. Sri Ramakrishna also was present there. In social gatherings, village women sometimes play with little girls, asking them which of the assembled boys they would like to marry. On this occasion, when they put this question to little Sarada, it seems she pointed to Sri Ramakrishna.

[2] About the time of her marriage, the Holy Mother used to say, "I was married at the time when dates ripen. I do not remember the exact month. Within ten days of my marriage, when I went to Kamarpukur, I plucked date fruits there. Dharma Das Laha (a neighbour and the londlord of Kamarpukur) came, and on seeing me, asked, 'Is this the newly married girl?' For I was so small that the father of Surju took me to Kamarpukur in his arms."

bridal money of Rs. 300 to Ramachandra on the occasion.

The marriage was perforce simple, as the family resources of both the parties did not admit of any elaboration of ceremonials or gifts. Chandra Devi, however, had borrowed a number of jewels from her rich neighbours, the Lahas, so that the bride may not be without some ornaments at the time of the marriage rites. Now after the bride's coming to Kamarpukur it was time to return the jewels to their owners. Chandra Devi was in a delicate situation. How could she tear away the jewels from the person of her little daughter-in-law who had already found a warm corner in her heart? Sri Ramakrishna, however, understood her difficulty and came to her rescue. While the little girl was sleeping, he cleverly removed all the jewels and sent them to the Laha family. When she woke up, she no doubt made enquiries of the missing jewels, perhaps tearfully; for she loved those bright and sparkling ornaments. And poor Chandra Devi could do no more than clasp her in a warm embrace and console her with the promise that her son would make her much better jewels afterwards.[1] To add to the tragedy of the situation, the incident came to the notice of an uncle of the girl who was then present in the house. He was very much enraged at this, and took the girl back to her paternal home

[1] As a matter of fact Sri Ramakrishna had ornaments made for the Holy Mother in later days, and she used to wear some of them till the end. See chap. VIII.

that very day. But Sri Ramakrishna made light of the affair, saying that whatever they might think about the incident, they could not nullify the marriage!

Sri Ramakrishna stayed in his village for one year and seven months. During this period, in December, 1860, his wife attained her seventh year. According to the family custom he went on this occasion to spend a few days at his father-in-law's house.[1] In later days the Holy Mother had a hazy remembrance of this visit. She remembered how, of her own accord, she touched her husband's feet in salutation and fanned him. Every one present laughed on seeing this. Afterwards Hriday, the Master's nephew, who accompanied him on this occasion, sought her and worshipped her[2] with lotus flowers to her great embarrassment.

Shortly after, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Kamarpukur with his wife, and after spending some days there returned to Calcutta. The Holy Mother also returned to her parental home.

[1] Referring to this visit of the Master, the Holy Mother used to say: "The Master came to Jayrambati when I was seven years old. You know there is the custom called 'going back to the father-in-law's house in couple'. That time he said to me, 'If anyone asks you at what age you were married, tell him it was at five and not at seven.'" He said this, thinking that, being a mere child of five at the time of marriage, she might not remember that occasion and confuse this second ceremony with the marriage.

[2] According to scriptures that inculcate Mother-worship, a virgin of tender age may be looked upon as a symbol of the Divine Mother, and worship may be offered to her in that spirit. It is generally done as an item in certain forms of elaborate ceremonial worship but sometimes independently also.

CHAPTER IV

VISIT TO DAKSHINESWAR

YEARS passed. Sri Ramakrishna was away at Dakshineswar performing austerities and experiencing the bliss of God-consciousness. Did he remember the girl whom he had wedded as an infant of five? Probably not. For when one was not aware of one's own body, how could one remember one's worldly relationships?

Meanwhile little Sarada had grown up into a young woman. She was now eighteen, fully mature in body and in mind. Sweet memories of her husband were, no doubt, lingering in her mind. When she was fourteen, she had spent three months in the company of Sri Ramakrishna during the latter's short sojourn at Kamarpukur. She had found him very tender and kind at that time. He was, no doubt, above the ordinary run of men in his love of God and purity of mind, but in other respects she had found him perfectly normal and human. She had noticed an utter selflessness in the care and cordiality he had bestowed on her then, and her mind had been much impressed by the instructions he had given her about

God and devotional life and about the way of discharging one's duties and responsibilities in the world. To the Hindu wife, who is taught to look upon her husband as a veritable God, as her sole refuge here and hereafter, there is nothing more gratifying than the consciousness of having secured his respect and attention. To the Holy Mother, therefore, this occasion of her first real contact with her husband was an unforgettable experience. Recalling the inner feelings she experienced in those days, she used to tell her women disciples, "I then felt as if a pitcher of bliss was kept in my heart. It was a constant experience with me then. It is very difficult to convey an idea of this experience to others."[1]

[1] Narrating the lighter incidents of her life during her stay at Kamarpukur on this occasion, the Holy Mother would say: "When I was still quite young, the Master once came to Kamarpukur with stomach trouble. During the early hours of the morning he would wake up from sleep and tell us about the dishes I should prepare for his midday meal. I would follow his directions. One day I found that I had not a particular spice with which he wanted the vegetables flavoured. My sister-in-law (Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother's wife) asked me to cook without that spice. The Master heard those words and said, 'How is it? If you have not the spice, get it from the market. It is not proper to cook the curry without the spices necessary for it. I sacrificed the rich dishes of Dakshineswar temple and came here for the flavour of that spice, and you want to deprive me of that! That won't do.' My sister-in-law felt ashamed and sent for the spice.

"The Brahmani (*i.e.* Yogesvari, the Brahmin woman Sannyasin who instructed Sri Ramakrishna in Tantric practices) was then with us. The Master addressed her as mother, and I therefore looked upon her as my mother-in-law. I was rather afraid of her. She was very fond of red-pepper. She used to cook her own dishes—all hot stuff. Often she offered me these preparations. I would silently eat them and wipe out

Several years had now passed since that brief spell of bliss. The contact with her divine husband had enriched her consciousness with a sense of peace and introspectiveness, with a spirit of unselfish service and a feeling of unruffled satisfaction in all conditions of life. But the young wife in her could not help feeling an urge to be by his side and be of service to him. At the same time the voice of another sentiment seemed to whisper to her, as if to silence this impatience. It seemed to say: "He who was so very kind to you at the very first meeting will never forget you. In good time, he will, of his own accord, call you to his side. Wait in patience for that blessed occasion."

Thus silencing her impatience and giving no expression of any kind to her innermost longings, she kept herself busily engaged day and night in the various duties of her father's household. And she would have waited indefinitely in patience and submissiveness, had it not been for the very unpleasant shock that village gossip often gave her mind. Neighbours whispered that her husband had gone mad, and that he was going about naked, shouting the name of

the tears from my eyes. When she asked me how I liked them, I said in fear, 'Very nice!' My sister-in-law, however, would remark, 'Oh! they are very hot.' I noticed that the Brahmani was displeased at such remarks. She would say, 'Why do you say so? My "daughter" approves of these dishes. Nothing can please you. I will not give you my curries any more.'"

And the Holy Mother would laugh as she narrated these incidents.

It was during this period that the Brahmani picked a quarrel with Hriday and left the Master's company.

Hari. Not only that. As she expressed it to her disciples in later times, "In my early days at Jayrambati I was always busy with some work or other, and would never visit my neighbours; for people would blurt out at the very sight of me, 'Dear me, Syama's daughter has been married to a lunatic!' I avoided meeting anybody in order to escape such criticism."

At first she was tempted to ignore this kind of talk as idle gossip. But at the same time her mind was not free from anxious questionings. What should she do if the worst were true? Had he really changed from the pure, pious and loving soul that she found him to be some four years back? In that case, would it be proper for her to be staying at her father's house? Was it not her duty then to be by his side and be of service to him? Days were spent in anxious thoughts of this kind, quite unknown even to her nearest kith and kin. Finally, she came to the conclusion that under the circumstances, it was better for her to go once to Dakshineswar and see things for herself. She could then decide as to where her duty lay.

Very soon an opportunity presented itself. Some women distantly related to her were going to Calcutta to have a bath in the Ganges on the auspicious occasion of Sri Chaitanya's birth anniversary. She told them that she too would accompany them for that purpose. They communicated the information to her father Ramachandra. Ramachandra was not

slow in understanding his daughter's real object in visiting Calcutta. So he offered to escort her himself.

An auspicious day was then selected, and the party soon started on their long journey towards the end of March, 1872. They had to travel all the distance on foot; for in those days there was no railway or steamer service to Calcutta, and the only other alternative means of travel, namely, the palanquin, was beyond the financial capacity of people like them. The first two days of the journey were very pleasant. Corn-fields and lotus-ponds greeted their eyes everywhere, while the shades of antique-looking banyan trees offered them protection from the heat of the noonday sun. They were not, however, destined to complete their journey in the same joyous fashion. For on the third day the Holy Mother, who was not accustomed to such long walks, fell ill of high fever, probably owing to the fatigue of the journey. Ramachandra was constrained to break the journey and take shelter in a wayside resthouse until his daughter was again fit to travel.

The Holy Mother felt very anxious over this unexpected trouble on the way. She was, however, much relieved in body and mind by a wonderful vision she had at night. Of this she spoke to her devotees in later days to the following effect: "I was lying unconscious owing to fever, without any sense of decorum even. Just then I saw a

woman, pitch dark in complexion, sitting by my side. Though she was dark, I have never seen another so beautiful as she. She stroked my aching head with her soft cool hands, and I felt the heat in my body subsiding. 'Where are you from?' I asked her. And she replied, 'From Dakshineswar.' At this I was speechless with wonder and exclaimed, 'From Dakshineswar! I too am going to Dakshineswar to see my husband. But this fever has unfortunately detained me on the way.' To this she replied, 'Don't worry. You will soon be all right and see your husband at Dakshineswar. It is for your sake that I have kept him there.' I said to her, 'Indeed! Is it so? But who are you to me?' 'I am your sister,' she replied. I was much astonished to hear this. After this conversation I fell asleep."[1]

[1] This is the first authenticated mystical phenomenon that we come across in her life. There are, however, traditions regarding certain occult facts about the period of her life already covered. These cannot at present be verified by reference to any authoritative source. Still we record them as matter that may be interesting from the purely occult point of view. But they should not be confused with the true spiritual greatness of the personality we are dealing with. Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother never attached any importance to such incidents that smack of miracles. The following is a brief statement of these traditions:

(*a*) The first is regarding her birth. Her mother Syamasundari Devi had once gone to Sihor to attend a religious festival. There, while she sat under a tree near the temple, she experienced as if a quantity of air entered into her body and made her feel heavy. Just then a beautiful girl of five or six, dressed in a red silk sari, descended from the tree, and throwing her tender arms round her neck, said, "Mother, I am coming to your house." That girl seemed to enter into the body of Syamasundari Devi and she fell into a trance.

Next morning Ramachandra found that his daughter was free from fever. He, therefore, thought it better to proceed than stay indefinitely in that inconvenient resthouse on the wayside. Fortunately, as they proceeded, they came across a palanquin which they engaged. That night, too, the Holy Mother had a relapse of the fever. It was, however, a mild attack, and she did not mention it to anybody. So they proceeded, and covered the distance little by little, reaching Dakshineswar at 9 o'clock in the night.

And what was the type of welcome that awaited her at Dakshineswar? Let her speak in her own simple way. "I went straight to the Master's room," she said, "while the others went to the Nahabat (*i.e.* orchestra block or concert house) where my mother-in-law was living. The Master said to me, 'Ah! you are here! All right.' And he asked someone to spread a mat on the floor. Then he

(*b*) The Holy Mother is reported to have told a disciple: "You see, my child, I used to notice during my childhood that a girl, just like me, would always roam about with me and help me in all my work. She would also laugh and play with me. That continued until my tenth or eleventh year."

(*c*) While she was thirteen, she once went to Kamarpukur Being very young and new to the house, she used to feel afraid to go to the outer tank for her bath. One day, coming out of the backdoor of the house, she was thinking of her difficulty, when she found all of a sudden eight women near her. As she proceeded to the street leading to the tank, they escorted her, four of them walking in front and the other four behind. They bathed with her in the tank of the Haldars, and came back with her to the house. This happened for several days. She could not make out who these women were.

added, 'Alas! Would that my Mathur[1] were alive now! By his death my right hand, as it were, is broken.' Mathur had died a few months before. Akshay (the son of the Master's elder brother) also was dead. Should I have had to live in that inconvenient place (*i.e.* the Nahabat) had Mathur been alive? He would have built a mansion for me. Anyway, after seeing the Master I wanted to go to the Nahabat. But the Master said, 'No, no. Stay here. It would be rather difficult for the doctor to see you in the Nahabat.' I spent the night in the room. A woman companion slept with me. Hriday gave us two or three baskets of puffed rice; for all had finished their supper when we arrived. Next day a doctor visited me. Within a few days I felt all right, and went to live in the room in the Nahabat. My mother-in-law was then staying in the Nahabat. Before that she had been living in a room in the building used by the owners of the temple-garden. Akshay had died in that house. Therefore she left it. She said, 'I shall not live there any longer. I shall live in the Nahabat and turn my face towards the Ganges. I do not need the building any more.'"

The Holy Mother was cured of her fever, but the physical relief she felt was nothing compared with her mental appeasement on account of her first

[1] Son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, the foundress of the Dakshineswar temple, who became the proprietor of it after her time. He was both the patron and devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, and used to spend money unstintedly for his service.

experiences at Dakshineswar. The worst fears she had in mind were now laid at rest. Experience proved those disquieting rumours to be nothing but the idle gossip of worldlings whose hearts and heads were blind to the spiritual glory of Sri Ramakrishna. He had not forgotten her, nor was there any indication of his sanity being in peril. The care and solicitude he showed at the time of her illness, the personal attention he bestowed on her treatment and nursing, went to strengthen the previous impressions she had of his unselfish kindness and saintly character. She had now no more doubts regarding her duty for the rest of her life. She decided to stay at Dakshineswar and be of service to the Master and his revered mother.

Ramachandra, too, rejoiced to see his daughter so cordially received by her husband and to find her happy in his company. So, after a few days' stay at Dakshineswar, he returned home alone, free from the anxious thoughts about his daughter's future that must have been tormenting his mind till then.

CHAPTER V

THE FIERY ORDEAL

IT is in the stress of circumstances that a truly great man reveals the strength of his character. Imagine the reaction of a lifelong ascetic when he is suddenly confronted with his young wife, who has come with the definite purpose of meeting him and, possibly, of asserting her claim over him. If he were a stern ascetic, he would shun her ; if not, he would gradually succumb to her influence. Sri Ramakrishna did neither. His reactions had a uniqueness of their own. It has already been mentioned that he received her cordially, but what followed was even more remarkable. He decided to avail himself of his wife's presence at Dakshineswar to do two things—firstly, to fulfil his foremost duty to her as a husband, namely, to educate her in the high ideals of life for which he stood, and secondly, to subject his own mind to a crucial test in point of same-sightedness and freedom from lower instincts. Of these, the first was a long and subtle process of spiritual education, which will be described elsewhere. As for the second, Sri Ramakrishna, on meeting his wife, remembered the precious advice

he had been given by his master, Totapuri, when he knew that his disciple was married. A wife, he said, presented no danger to one, if one were really established in Brahman. He whose mental purity was based upon a strong sense of distinction between the sexes, was no doubt a good aspirant, but the realization of Brahman was still far away from him. For a true seer of Brahman would see no difference between man and woman, and his purity of behaviour would be based, not on a sense of moral conflict, but on this supersensuous perception of unity. So Sri Ramakrishna felt that the presence of his wife at Dakshineswar was for him an opportunity to test his own attainment in this respect. He was a radical by temperament, and when an idea entered his mind, he felt he must carry it out at once. So unlike an ordinary ascetic he allowed his wife to be by his side and serve him to her heart's content. Not only that, for about six months of her stay at Dakshineswar, he permitted her even to sleep with him.

This was, indeed, a fiery ordeal for any youthful ascetic, but not for Sri Ramakrishna. His discriminating mind could not be caught in any worldly snare. The nature of this test and the reactions of his mind to it are best described in the eloquent words of Swami Saradananda, the disciple and biographer of Sri Ramakrishna. He writes: "One day, seeing the Holy Mother sleeping by his side, the Master discriminated within himself: 'O mind,

this is what the world calls the body of a woman. Men wistfully run after it. But one who goes after it remains enmeshed in body-consciousness, and cannot attain God. Now, O my mind, be not insincere—say not one thing outside and have another idea in the heart. Tell me, do you want this woman's body, or do you want the Lord? If the first, here it is in front of you, and you are free to have it.' Discriminating in this way, he was about to touch the Holy Mother, when his mind recoiled so violently that he was absorbed in Samadhi for the whole night! Next morning the name of the Lord had to be uttered long in his ears before his mind came to the sense plane."

This will give one an idea of the kind of conjugal life that the Holy Mother had with her saintly husband. To complete the picture of it, another incident quite characteristic of Sri Ramakrishna may be mentioned here. One day his youthful wife was massaging his feet. She put him a straight question. "How do you look upon me?" she asked. And Sri Ramakrishna replied, "The Mother who is the Deity in the temple, the mother who gave birth to me and now resides in the Nahabat—even she is now massaging my feet. I look upon you in that light—as the embodiment of Motherhood." These are, indeed, puzzling words for the sense-bound mind of man, but they were only a commonplace in the mouth of Sri Ramakrishna, the true worshipper of the Universal Mother.

There have been people who have expressed sympathy for the Holy Mother on account of what they consider the barrenness of her married life. For did not the very greatness of her husband stand in the way of her experiencing the substance of matrimonial life, and what is more, the greatest privilege of a woman, namely, motherhood? Indeed, her own mother, Syamasundari Devi, seems to have felt in this way at one time, and remarked in the hearing of Sri Ramakrishna, "My Sarada has been married to a lunatic. She has not known family life. She has no children. She will never know the happiness of being addressed as 'mother'." At this Sri Ramakrishna remarked, "Well, mother, you need not worry about that. Your daughter will have so many children that she will be tired of being addressed day and night as 'Mother'."

But the remarkable fact about this phase of the Holy Mother's life is that, unlike her sympathisers, she herself never felt aggrieved on this account. In later times it was with a feeling of exaltation that she would refer to those blessed days she had spent with the Master. She used to say: "The divine state in which the Master used to be absorbed, passes all description. In ecstatic moods he would smile or weep, or at times remain perfectly still in deep Samadhi. This would sometimes continue throughout the night. In that divine presence my whole body would tremble with awe, and I would anxiously await the dawn. For I knew nothing of ecstasy in

those days. One night his Samadhi continued for a very long time. Greatly frightened, I sent for Hriday. He came and began to repeat the name of the Lord in the Master's ears. When he had done this for a little while, external consciousness reappeared. After this incident, he came to know of my difficulty, and taught me the appropriate divine names that should be uttered in the ear in particular states of Samadhi. Thenceforth my fear was much lessened, as he would invariably come to earthly consciousness on the utterance of the particular divine names. But even after this, I sometimes kept awake whole nights, as there was no knowing when he would fall into Samadhi. By degrees he came to know of my difficulty. He learnt that even after the lapse of a considerable length of time I could not adjust myself to his Samadhi temperament. So he asked me to sleep separately at the Nahabat."

Indeed, the attitude of pity which some feel for the Holy Mother for what they consider her enforced virginhood in married life, is based upon a total ignorance of her exalted spiritual state. If she chose, it was perhaps open to her to have drawn Sri Ramakrishna to the ordinary level of life. But she was constituted otherwise. "Do you want to drag me down into Maya?" Sri Ramakrishna asked her once in the early days of his association with her at Dakshineswar. "Why should I do that?" came the prompt reply,

"I have come only to help you in the path of religious life." [1]

A noble answer, indeed! Only a woman of immaculate purity of mind could have given it. There was no artifice in it, no hypocritical intention to please anybody. It was the spontaneous expression of her nature, of the lofty ideal of life that had unconsciously become hers as much as her husband's.

In fact the world at large has not yet recognized the important part played by the Holy Mother in fulfilling this aspect of Sri Ramakrishna's life. Often there is a tendency to attribute this unique feature of their married life entirely to the saintly character of Sri Ramakrishna. But it is forgotten that at least an equal share of the credit for this is due to the Holy Mother. For such an ideal could be translated into life only because she was his match in point of purity, and co-operated with him whole-heartedly in the fulfilment of the ideal.

Sri Ramakrishna himself was the first to appreciate her exalted spiritual state and to recognize the immense value of her contribution to his religious life. "Had she not been so pure," he said to his disciples in later times, "who knows whether I might not have lost my self-control from her inducements? After marriage I prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, remove even the least taint of carnality from the mind of my wife.' When I lived with her,

[1] The Holy Mother spoke of this to Yogin-Ma.

I understood that the Mother had really granted my prayer."

This admission of Sri Ramakrishna, especially in the light of his conduct towards the Holy Mother soon after her arrival at Dakshineswar, is full of import. It gives us a glimpse of the spiritual evolution of the Holy Mother during the days when the Master was performing austerities at Dakshineswar. Does the above prayer of the Master signify an affirmation of mind by which he made her in spirit the participant of his memorable religious practices? Did it establish an unconscious spiritual link between the two individuals, so that in spite of distance and years of separation, the one could draw the sap of holiness that the other was accumulating in the solitude of the Dakshineswar temple-garden? The spiritual fitness that the Master recognized in the Holy Mother on her unexpected appearance at Dakshineswar justifies such an inference. Besides, the Master's own words reveal the subtle unseen relation that existed between him and his chief disciples. "The devotees are like Kalmi greens," he said. "If one end of it is pulled, the whole group of shoots connected with it must come out."

The same fact is further confirmed by the remarkable form of worship that Sri Ramakrishna performed as the culmination of his spiritual practices. In that rite he placed the Holy Mother on the pedestal of the Deity and worshipped her as the great Mother

of the universe. It looks as if her association with him in this final act of his austerities is the conclusion of a long process of soul culture beginning with the prayer at the time of his marriage, which, strangely enough, coincides approximately with the commencement of his austerities.

The next chapter will describe in more detail this great act of worship that Sri Ramakrishna performed with the Holy Mother as the symbol of the Deity.

CHAPTER VI

THE ASCENT TO MOTHERHOOD

IT was the 5th of June, 1872,[1] the day for the special worship of Phalaharini-Kalika, or the Deity as Mother Kali destroying the effects of the past deeds of beings. The Kali temple of Dakshineswar was *en fete* with ceremonial decorations. By night, when the worship of the Divine Mother was to take place, a good crowd had gathered in the temple, and everywhere there was singing and excitement characteristic of temple festivities.

[1] Regarding the exact date of this event there are two versions. The Holy Mother arrived at Dakshineswar for the first time in March, 1872. According to the version of Swami Saradananda in his biography of Sri Ramakrishna, the worship took place about one year after this, *i.e.* on the Phalaharini-Kali Puja of 1873, the date of it being 25th May. In the Bengali book entitled *Mayer Katha*, Vol. II, the Holy Mother is reported to have said that it took place about a month and a half after her arrival at Dakshineswar. In that case it would be on the occasion of the Phalaharini-Kali Puja of June, 1872.

Sj. Ramachandra Datta in his Bengali life of Sri Ramakrishna has mentioned that this worship took place at Jayrambati. Contradicting this, the Holy Mother says in *Mayer Katha*, Vol. II: "Ram Babu has written in his book that this worship was performed at Jayrambati. Ah me! People in that part of the country are so gossipy. They always used to cut jokes, saying, 'Who is it that has married the poor girl? A crazy man!' Worshipping a woman there! That would have finished both of us!"

The doors of the Master's room remained closed. The noisy crowd had not invaded its precincts; for people were busy with many things outside, and besides, the Master had not yet become very widely known. Within the room, too, preparations were being made for the Master to perform the worship of the Divine Mother that day. A boy named Dinu, a distant nephew of his, brought the Bilva leaves, while Hriday made the necessary arrangements for the rite. The Master had asked the Holy Mother beforehand to be present in the room at the time of worship. At 9 p.m. she arrived. The others had by that time finished the arrangements and left the room, leaving the Master and the Holy Mother alone within.

Now the worship began. The Master sat near the western door of his room facing the east. After he had finished the purification of materials and other preliminary ceremonies, he beckoned to the Holy Mother to take her place on the seat set apart for the Deity. It was a low stool with ritualistic drawings on it, kept towards the right of the worshipper, and she sat on it facing the west. She was already in a mood of spiritual fervour, and obeyed the Master's directions as one under hypnosis. The Master now sprinkled her several times with holy water, and then addressed the following prayer of invocation: "O Divine Mother, Thou eternal Virgin, the mistress of all powers and the abode of all beauty, deign to unlock for me the

gate of perfection. Sanctifying the body and mind of this woman, do thou manifest Thyself through her and do what is auspicious."

Then he identified the Holy Mother with the Deity through the ceremony of Nyasa, which consists in touching the different parts of the body with appropriate Mantras and identifying them in mind with the different parts of the Deity. After that, he offered her worship with sixteen items, as one does before the divine image. In the course of it he applied red paint to the sides of her soles, put the vermilion mark on her forehead, dressed her with a new cloth, and gave a little of sweets and betel-leaf in her mouth. Knowing that she was naturally of a very bashful disposition, a disciple once asked her whether she did not feel any hesitation or shyness when the Master did all this to her. She replied, "No. I saw him, no doubt, doing all this, but I had no inclination to utter a word even."

In fact, all through the worship the Holy Mother was in a state of semi-absorption, and at the close of it, in deep Samadhi. The Master too was in an ecstatic mood while doing the worship, and by the time it came to an end, he was also absorbed in Samadhi. Thus in that transcendental union of the spirit, the worshipper and the worshipped realized their identity of being as Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

A long time passed in that state of spiritual absorption. It was only when the second watch of

the night had fairly advanced that the Master regained a little of physical consciousness. Then he resigned himself completely to the Divine Mother, and in a supreme act of consecration, offered to the Deity manifest before him, the fruits of his austerities, his rosary, himself and everything that was his. He then uttered the following Mantra: "O Goddess, I prostrate myself before Thee again and again—before Thee, eternal consort of Siva, the three-eyed, the golden-hued, the indwelling Spirit in all, the giver of refuge, the accomplisher of every end, and the most auspicious among all auspicious objects."

The worship[1] was now over. Towards the close of it Hriday came into the room. After regaining normal consciousness, the Holy Mother saluted the Master mentally, and walked away to her room in the Nahabat.

The significance of this great rite on the lives of these two souls can hardly be over-estimated. For

[1] The form of worship Sri Ramakrishna performed is technically called Shodasi Puja. The term requires a little explanation. It does not mean, as is sometimes interpreted, 'the worship of a girl of sixteen'. For the matter of that, the Holy Mother was eighteen or more at the time of this worship. It really means the worship of the Divine Mother as Shodasi—the third of the ten Mahavidyas known as Kali, Tara, Shodasi, Bhuvanesvari, Bhairavi, Chhinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagala, Matangi and Kamala. The Divine Mother is called Shodasi in this aspect because she is conceived as a wonderfully beautiful girl always aged sixteen. In this worship one can use as the emblem of worship either a picture, a pitcher, an earthen image, a Yantra (*i.e.* a ritualistic drawing), or a young woman of great beauty. In the case of the last emblem, which was the one adopted by Sri Ramakrishna, the woman need not necessarily be sixteen years of age. What is required is that she must be beautiful and in the heyday of youth.

Sri Ramakrishna it signified the final triumph of the spirit over the body, the destruction of all that is animal in man, the recognition of Divinity even where the ordinary man is least disposed to see it. It marked the successful conclusion of his spiritual strivings, and his establishment in the status of a divine man.

In the life of the Holy Mother, too, it had a significance of equal importance. It symbolized her participation in Sri Ramakrishna's life in a twofold sense. It has already been stated how the Master, at the very time of his marriage, gave a powerful stimulus to his wife's spiritual growth by the prayer he addressed to the Divine Mother. That had brought about a gradual transformation in her, obliterating from her mind even the last vestiges of the lower nature, so that when she again reappeared in the concluding act of the drama of his spiritual endeavours, he found in her a fitting partner in life, well-matched with him in every respect. And so by the performance of that great rite, in which he surrendered all his spiritual practices and their fruits before the Deity whom he identified with the Holy Mother, he virtually made her a participant of all his austerities and spiritual attainments. It is sometimes asked, with an insinuation of a difference in the spiritual status of the Master and the Holy Mother, why the latter did not perform various forms of devotional practices like the Master. The answer to this apparently puzzling question is to be found in

the Shodasi Puja, by virtue of which the Holy Mother became a full sharer in the spiritual glory of the Master. Indeed, as we shall see, she did practise a good deal of austerities afterwards, but they were not so much for mental purification or for spiritual attainment; they were mainly intended as an example to others or as vicarious practices for the benefit of her disciples. To use an analogy of the Master, she resembles in this respect the type of plant that bears fruits first, and then the flowers. As the spiritual counterpart of the great world-teacher Sri Ramakrishna, she had no need to re-enact the same scenes of the one common drama which they were together staging before mankind. She had other parts to play by way of fulfilling and supplementing the Master's work.

In another sense also the Shodasi Puja is a landmark in her life. It made her a vital part of Sri Ramakrishna's mission. In that rite the Master invoked in her the presence of the Divine Mother—the same Supreme Energy that was manifesting Itself through his own personality. Henceforth, just as in the case of the Master, her body and mind became the venue of expression for that Energy. Her future actions were all, therefore, devoid of any personal object, but meant to fulfil the great mission that was being worked out through the Master. She and the Master could henceforth be described as two bodies actuated by the same spirit—the Divine Mother. As we shall see, for the rest of her life she helped the

Master in his work through personal service. After his passing away, his mantle fell on her, and through a long period of spiritual ministry she fulfilled what he had left unfinished.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE FEET OF THE MASTER

THE life of the Holy Mother at Dakshineswar was by no means eventful, if by events we understand striking happenings in the external world. It was a life of quiet unobtrusive service, coupled with the realization of spiritual truths in the silence of the soul. Of these two phases of her life, the first will be treated at length in the next chapter. Here we shall confine our attention to her spiritual practices under the guidance of the Master.

While for the purpose of exposition one may separate these aspects of her life, they form an integral whole from the point of view of her discipleship and spiritual development. For among her spiritual practices, the first and foremost was the service of the Master, who was to her, as she said in later days, "God Eternal and Absolute as her husband and in the general spiritual sense". Every Hindu woman who has received the right spiritual training looks upon her husband as a symbol of the Divinity and believes that unselfish service to him in the right attitude of mind is her principal means of spiritual progress. Her faith in this respect

receives encouragement and support from the Mahabharata story which depicts how a woman, by performing her duty to her husband and family, attained a spiritual eminence which an ascetic could not with all his austerities in a solitary forest. While every woman may put this attitude into practice in regard to her husband, the efficacy of it, however, is much greater, if the object of her adoration is a personality of high spiritual development. For in that case, close contact and loving thought, which service invariably requires, give one an opportunity to participate in the spiritual consciousness of a highly evolved being and thereby to raise oneself to the same spiritual level as his.

The Holy Mother's service of Sri Ramakrishna possessed this higher efficacy; for he, the object of her love and adoration, was a perfect man, nay, an incarnation of the Divinity. By the intensity of his life and thought he has generated a wave of spiritual energy, a stress or proclivity in the higher levels of consciousness. By putting oneself within the orbit of its influence through devout contemplation on his personality, one's mind gradually gets established in the same level of consciousness without all the drudgery and fluctuations of fortune attendant on mere individual struggle. It is in this sense that every incarnation is said to establish a new way of spiritual striving and to continue to be a potent force in the lives of men even long after his earthly career. To the Holy Mother was given

the opportunity of communing with such a divine man through personal service, and thus not only of being herself drawn to that current of spiritual consciousness centering round him, but also showing the way to this attainment to future generations.

Service requires the aid of devotion and meditation in order to be converted into a spiritual energy; for without it one cannot engender the attitude of mind capable of transforming work, which is merely mechanical, into an energy of a higher quality. So in the training that Sri Ramakrishna gave to the Holy Mother, the practice of devotion and meditation formed an important part. What she was required to do was to absorb that burning renunciation and insatiable hankering for God that formed the characteristic features of his life. The kind of teaching that Sri Ramakrishna imparted to her can be understood from the following words he addressed to her one day: "The moon is addressed as uncle by all children. So also God is the 'uncle', the common property, of all. Everyone has a right to call on Him. Whoever thus calls on Him becomes blessed by realizing Him. If you, therefore, turn your attention to Him, you too can attain Him." It is said this instruction was given to her a few days before the Shodasi Puja, and it had a powerful effect on her mind.

Another day the Holy Mother went to the Master's room with a woman devotee to serve his night meal. Her face was veiled; for her shyness

was so great that in those days she never appeared even before the Master without the veil. That day the Master began to speak to her of God and the spiritual life in a highly inspired mood. As he proceeded, he lost all sense of time and talked away the whole night, unmindful of the hour. The Holy Mother, too, was caught up in the magic of his words, and stood listening to him, oblivious of everything else. When dawn broke, she found herself standing before him with the veil entirely thrown back from the face, lost in the fervour of his words. Daylight recalled her to herself, and she quickly drew the veil and ran to the Nahabat.

Besides such general instructions and exhortations, the Master also initiated her into the practice of Japa and meditation, which form the basis of higher spiritual discipline. While at Kamarpukur, the Holy Mother had been given Shakti Mantra (the holy word for worship of the Deity as Divine Mother) by a Sannyasin named Purnananda. She was again initiated by the Master, who wrote the Bija (the mystic syllable forming the core of a Mantra) on her tongue. It is known that she used to spend long hours in Japa and meditation even in the midst of the very heavy work in the service of the Master and devotees. She told her niece Nalini: "What a lot of work I did when I was of your age! And yet I could find time to repeat my Mantra a hundred thousand times every day."

Beyond a few glimpses of this kind, we have little record of the Master's spiritual instructions to her and the way in which he imparted them.[1] The Holy Mother seldom spoke of this subject to others. But we know for certain that the Master's teachings had a tremendous effect on her pure mind. To a disciple she gave a glimpse of her inner life in the following words: "During my days at Dakshineswar, I used to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and sit in meditation. Often I used to be totally absorbed in it. Once, on a moonlit night, I was performing Japa, sitting near the steps of the Nahabat. Everything was quiet. I did not even know when the Master passed that way. On other days I would hear the sound of his slippers, but on this, did not. I was totally absorbed in meditation. In those days I looked different. I used to put on ornaments and had a cloth with red borders. On this day the cloth had slipped off from my back owing to the breeze, but I was unconscious of it. It seems 'son Yogen'[2] went that way to give the water-jug to the Master and saw me in that condition. Ah! the ecstasy of those days! On moonlit

[1] It is also known from her own words that the Master taught her various Mantras pertaining to different aspects of the Deity, with instructions as to how to impart them.

[2] The Holy Mother used thus to distinguish Swami Yogananda (Yogen), a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, from Yogin-Ma, a woman disciple of the Master and a lifelong companion of hers, whom she addressed merely as Yogin or 'daughter Yogin'. See ch. XVII for an account of both these persons.

nights I would look at the moon and pray with folded hands, 'May my heart be as pure as the rays of yonder moon!' or 'O Lord, there is a stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind!' If one is steady in meditation, one will clearly see the Lord in one's heart and hear His voice. The moment an idea flashes in the mind of such a one, it will be fulfilled then and there. You will be bathed in peace. Ah! What a mind I had at that time! Brinde, the maidservant, one day dropped a metal plate in front of me, with a bang. The sound penetrated into my heart.[1] In the fullness of one's spiritual realization, one will find that He who resides in one's heart resides in the heart of others as well—the oppressed, the persecuted, the untouchable and the outcast. This realization makes one truly humble."

There is ample evidence to make one believe that she attained to exalted states of spiritual consciousness during this period of her life. But she was by nature so modest and unassuming that she would seldom speak to others of such facts of her life as might glorify her in their eyes. Sometimes certain happenings leaked out when any of her companions happened to be by her side. One such instance we come across in the account left by Yogin-Ma of an

[1] The Holy Mother was then meditating in the Nahabat and felt the sound like a clap of thunder, and she burst into tears. According to text-books on Yoga (the art of concentration), when the mind is just getting into a very tense state of concentration, even a slight sound will appear like a peal of thunder.

exalted spiritual mood she witnessed personally in the Holy Mother. We give below her own words, a little abridged :

" When the Mother first came to Dakshineswar, she had not experienced Samadhi. Though she practised meditation and Japa every day with utmost devotion, we did not hear of her going into Samadhi at that time. On the other hand she even felt frightened at the sight of the Master's Samadhi in the days when she slept with him. After I had been acquainted with her for some time, she said to me one day, ' Please speak to the Master that through his grace I may experience Samadhi. On account of the constant presence of devotees, I hardly get any opportunity to speak to him about it myself.' I thought it was quite right and I should carry out her request.

" Next morning Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his bed alone when I went to his room, and after saluting him in the usual way, communicated the Mother's prayer to him. He listened to it, but did not give any reply. Suddenly he became very serious. When he was in that mood, no one dared to utter a word before him. So I left the room after sitting there silently for a while. Coming to the Nahabat, I found the Mother seated for her daily worship. I opened the door a little and peeped in. Strange to say, she was giggling and the next moment weeping. This went on alternately for some time. Tears were rolling down her cheeks in an unceasing stream.

Gradually she became very much absorbed into herself. I knew she was in Samadhi. So I closed the door and came away.

"A long while after, I went again to her room. She said to me, 'Are you just returning from the Master's room?' And I replied, 'How is it, Mother, that you say you never experience Samadhi and other high spiritual moods?' She was abashed and smiled.

"After that event I used sometimes to spend the night with her at Dakshineswar. Though I wanted to sleep on a separate bed, she would never listen to it. She would drag me to her side. One night somebody was playing the flute outside. That brought on her a high spiritual mood. She was laughing at intervals. With great hesitation I sat in one corner of the bed. I thought that, being a worldly person, I should not touch her at that time. After a long while her mind came to the ordinary state."

In later days, after the passing away of the Master, she had more frequent experiences of this exalted state. This will be dealt with in detail in the proper place.[1] Suffice it to say here that soon after her contact with the Master, her mind, pure and disciplined that it was, attained to great heights of concentration and illumination. Ecstasies and visions are only the by-products of spiritual realization. They may or may not appear according to

[1] See chaps. XI and XII.

2. Sri Ramakrishna In a High State of Yoga

temperament. The essence of realization, however, consists in a transformation of the inner life, not in any external manifestation. The Holy Mother was speaking from experience when she put this idea so beautifully in the following words: "What else does one obtain by the realization of God? Does one grow a pair of horns? No, our mind becomes pure, and through that pure mind comes enlightenment."

In conclusion it may be stated here that the training that the Master imparted to her did not exclude secular matters, especially the way of conducting oneself in everyday life. He instructed her that in arranging articles of domestic use, one must think out beforehand where particular things were to be kept. Those that were frequently required must be kept near at hand and the others at a distance. When a thing was temporarily removed from a place, particular care should be taken to see that it was put back exactly in the same place, so that one might not fail to locate it even in darkness. He taught her also the way of rolling wick, dressing vegetables, making betel rolls, cooking, and doing other items of domestic work. He taught her that while travelling in a boat or carriage, she should always be the first to get in and the last to get out; for then only one could properly check whether all luggages had been taken in or taken out. The secret of one's success in social relationships, he told her, depended entirely on one's capacity to adjust one's conduct according to time, place, circumstances, and

the nature of people one had to deal with and their behaviour. Physically every one was made of flesh and bones, but the mind within was constituted in entirely different ways. So one should be very careful in selecting one's friends and associates. With some one might mix freely, with others only a nodding acquaintance was advisable, and with still others it is better not to talk at all.

Thus the Master took pains to make the Holy Mother efficient in both spiritual and secular matters and prepared her for the great mission that he was to entrust to her at the close of his life.

3. THE NAHABAT

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE SERVICE OF THE MASTER

IN all, the Holy Mother stayed at Dakshineswar for over thirteen years, with occasional intervals of short visits to her parental home in Jayrambati. This was a period of great inner developments in her life, a few glimpses of which have been given in the previous chapter. It now remains to give an account of what may be described as the external part of her spiritual practice, namely, her service of the Master, as also the other interesting incidents that took place during her association with him.

For the greater part of this long period, she stayed in the Nahabat, an exceedingly inconvenient place for one to stay in. It was a very small two-storeyed block, in the upper room of which lived Sri Ramakrishna's mother during the last few years of her life. The small room on the ground floor was given to the Holy Mother to live in. To make it a fit residence for a Purdah lady, the verandah about it was covered with screens of plaited bamboo slips reaching above the head. As a consequence sunlight scarcely entered into it. Moreover, since she used to cook for the Master and his aged

mother, she was obliged to use this room as a provision store and kitchen also. Thus she sat and slept with vegetable baskets and sacks of rice and pulses about her, while above her head hung in slings the pots containing special articles of food to suit the Master's delicate stomach. "The room", the Holy Mother used to say in later days, "was so low that at first I would knock my head against the upper frame of the door. One day, I got a cut on the head. Then I became accustomed to it. The head bent of itself as soon as I approached the door. Many stout aristocratic women of Calcutta frequently came there. They never entered the room. They would stand at the door and lean forward holding the jambs. And peeping in they would remark, addressing me, 'Ah, what a tiny room for our good girl! She is, as it were, in exile, like Sita." [1]

The Master was not blind to the difficulties of her life at the Nahabat. But he was helpless in the matter of remedying them. For death had already removed from him his ardent devotee Mathuranath, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani and the proprietor of the temple, who used to look after all his personal needs with scrupulous attention and unstinting liberality. Mathur would have made every arrangement for the Holy Mother's comfortable

[1] While recounting these, the Holy Mother would turn to her nieces and say, "You won't be able to stay in such a room even for a day." "True, aunt!" they would ejaculate, "everything is so different with you."

stay at Dakshineswar, had she gone there in his lifetime. But the new proprietor who succeeded him was not so close to the Master.

Besides, there was no other place in the temple suitable for her residence. For she was very shy by temperament and could never stand the public gaze. Even before the Master she appeared only veiled in her early days. Her day generally began between 3 and 4 a.m. before any human being was up. At that early hour she would finish her bath in the Ganges[1] and get back to her room unnoticed by anyone. After that she would seldom come out of the room. Even for drying her luxuriant hair, she would wait till 1 p.m. when there would be no one in the neighbourhood of the Nahabat. She would then come out, and sitting on the steps of the Nahabat, bask in the sun and dry her hair. In fact she lived so quietly and unobserved by anybody that, to quote her own words, "The manager of the temple said, 'We have heard that she lives here, but we have never seen her.'"

This natural modesty and reserve of hers was, no doubt, very much appreciated by the Master. About this the Holy Mother once said: "The Master used to say, 'Dear Hridu (*i.e.* his nephew Hriday), I was extremely concerned about her when she first came here. She came from the country and

[1] It is said that once, on going to the Ganges at that early hour without any light, she was about to tread on a crocodile lying on the shore. The Master, on hearing of it, advised her never to go without a lantern.

did not know about the ways of city life.[1] I thought people would criticize her movements and we should all be hurt. But she is so wonderful that she has hidden herself completely from view.[2] I never saw her go outside for a wash or the like.' When I heard about his remark, I became anxious about myself. I knew that whatever idea flashed in his mind, came to happen. With great earnestness I used to pray to the Mother of the Universe, 'O Mother Divine, please be gracious enough to protect my modesty.' "

None the less the Master was very careful that continuous stay in that dark narrow room should

[1] She herself narrated a funny story relating to her experiences of city life, illustrating how strange the environment appeared to her. She said: "I had never seen water taps before. I came to Calcutta one day and entered a room where there was a tap. I opened the tap. Before the water rushed out, there came a hissing sound, like that of a snake, out of the tap. I was terror-stricken and ran from the room. I at once came to the other ladies of the house and cried, 'There is a snake in that water pipe. It is hissing.' They laughed and said, 'There is no snake there. Do not be afraid. The hissing sound comes from the pipe before the water rushes out.' Then we laughed and laughed till our sides began to ache."

[2] This does not at all mean that the Master wanted all women to be behind the Purdah and never take part in any activity outside. In fact several of his women disciples—Lakshmi-Didi, Golap-Ma and Gauri-Ma, for instance—were somewhat masculine in their temperament, without any exaggerated sense of feminine shyness. At least one of them, Gauri-Ma, started a public educational institution for women. The Master never asked these women to remain behind the Purdah. His idea was that the bashful and the forward were different types and they must be allowed to grow in their own way. It is significant in this connection to note the following words of the Holy Mother on Lakshmi-Didi: "Lakshmi (the niece and disciple of the Master) used to sing and dance before the Master imitating the professional musicians. The Master said to me, 'That is her attitude; but you must not imitate her and lose your modesty.'"

not imperil her health. In fact, after staying there for some time, she got a rheumatic pain in the legs. To quote her own words about its origin: "I used to stand behind the screen round the verandah of the Nahabat, and hear the Master sing and see him dance in ecstasy through the holes in the screen. It was standing there long that brought on rheumatism in my legs." As the Master knew all this, he took particular care to see that she did not injure her health. Of this the Holy Mother used to say: "He would tell me, 'A wild bird, if kept within a cage day and night, gets rheumatic. So you should have a walk at times in the neighbourhood.' At noon when people generally retired after the midday meal, the Master would go to the Panchavati and see whether there was anybody in the neighbourhood. If there was none, he would tell me, 'Just go out. There is none.' He would stand outside his room for a while, and I would go out of the place by the back gate and visit the ladies of the locality near Ramlal's house. After spending the rest of the day in conversation with them, I would come back at dusk when all people generally went to the temple to attend the evening service."

Realizing the Holy Mother's difficulties from insufficient accommodation, some of the devotees of the Master built a small cottage for her near the temple in 1874. Sambhu Mallick acquired a plot of land on lease for Rs. 250, and began constructing the cottage on it. Captain Visvanath Upadhyaya, the

agent of the Nepal Government in Calcutta, was a great devotee of the Master. As he was in charge of the Nepal Government's timber yard in Calcutta, he offered to give all the timber necessary for the cottage. Accordingly, three logs of wood were towed up the Ganges, but unfortunately one of these was carried away by the flood tide at night. Strangely enough, Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, was displeased with the Holy Mother for this, as he attributed it to her ill-luck and want of faith. When the Captain heard of the incident, he sent another log, and with it the construction of the house was completed.

The Holy Mother lived in this house for about a year. To help her and keep company with her, a maidservant was engaged. There the Holy Mother would cook the food for the Master and bring it to the temple to serve it personally to him. The Master, too, to please her as well as to see whether everything was going on well, would visit her house once in the day, and after spending a little time there, invariably come back to the temple by dusk. One day, however, there was a break in this rule. He had gone in the evening to the Mother's house, but owing to heavy rain he could not come back. So he had to spend the night in the house, and while the Holy Mother was serving him food, he jocularly remarked, "Do not the priests of the Kali temple go home at night? I am also doing likewise, am I not?"

About a year after, Sri Ramakrishna had a severe attack of dysentery, and in order to be by his side to nurse him, she returned to the Nahabat. Afterwards she seems to have never gone back to her cottage. For what reason she did not do so, is not known.

The Holy Mother's chief duty at Dakshineswar was cooking. Sri Ramakrishna had a very delicate stomach which easily got upset by any irregularity in food. The preparation of his food, therefore, had to be done with scrupulous care and attention, and it was found that only the Holy Mother could do it in just the way that suited the requirements of his health. Whenever she was away from Dakshineswar, the Master used to suffer, and he would sometimes send word to her, asking her to come back soon. Referring to his utter dependence on her in this respect, he once humorously remarked to somebody, "Well, what does a 'wife' signify in the case of one like me?" And he himself gave the reply with a smile, "Don't you see? But for her, who would have prepared my food in just the way that suits my health?"

In earlier days, she had to cook only for the Master and his old mother, Chandra Devi. As we have seen, Chandra Devi shifted to the Nahabat in order to be close to the Ganges. The Holy Mother was her companion and attendant. Yogin-Ma reports that even amidst her heavy duties the Holy Mother used to be so vigilant about the service of her

mother-in-law that before she called out her name in full, she would rush to her side. When Yogin-Ma remonstrated with her, saying that by running in such haste she might knock her head against the doorway and hurt herself, she would reply, "It does not matter much even if it happens so. She is my Guru, and she is also my mother. Ah, she is so old, and if I do not go to her in time, she may be put to inconvenience. That is why I run to her in such haste."

As days went on and devotees began to gather round the Master, the volume of cooking the Holy Mother had to do, increased. For at times several devotees would stay with the Master, and they had to be fed and taken care of. From some of her recorded conversations we get a glimpse of the heavy work that fell on her. She said to a disciple: "I used to cook for the Master. He had poor digestion. So he could not eat the food offerings from the Kali temple. I had to cook also for the devotees of the Master. Latu lived with him. Having had a difference with Ram Datta, he had come away. The Master said to me, 'He is a nice boy; he will knead flour for you.'[1] I had to cook day and night. When Ram Datta came, he would shout after getting out of the carriage, 'Today

[1] Latu later on became a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and came to be known as Swami Adbhutananda. One day he was meditating at dusk. The Master went up to him and said, "That (*i.e.* the Deity), on whom you are meditating, is making Chapatis in the Nahabat. Go and help her by kneading the flour."

I shall have Chapatis (Indian bread) and gram Dal (a kind of soup).' Then I would at once start cooking. I used to make Chapatis out of three or four seers of flour.[1] When Rakhal lived there, I often made Khichuri for him. The Master one day asked me to cook nicely for Naren. I prepared some Mug (green gram) soup and Chapatis. When the meal was over, the Master asked Naren, 'How did you enjoy the meal?' 'Very well,' he replied, 'but it tasted like sick diet.' At this the Master said to me, 'What sort of stuff have you cooked for him? You must prepare for him thick gram Dal and heavy Chapatis.' Finally I prepared those things and Naren was very pleased. Suren Mitra gave ten rupees a month for the expenses of the devotees. Gopal Senior did the marketing. Dancing, devotional music, ecstasy and Samadhi went on day and night. I made little holes in the bamboo-mat screen, so that I could watch through it.[2] Standing there continually, I got this rheumatism in the end."

[1] According to Yogin-Ma, she used to make Chapatis from seven pounds of flour and betel rolls without number. Besides she would boil milk for the Master for a long time, as he liked the thick cream.

[2] According to Lakshmi-Didi, the Master purposely kept the northern door of his room open, so that the Holy Mother could see all this from the Nahabat. Seeing the holes in the bamboo-mat screen becoming bigger day by day, the Master would humorously remark to his nephew, Ramlal, "O Ramlal, your aunt's seclusion (Purdah) is going to be affected!" To this Ramlal would reply, "You alone are responsible for that. Why do you keep the northern door open in spite of my repeatedly closing it?"

Sometimes her skill as a cook was tried to the utmost. One evening some distinguished gentlemen came to Sri Ramakrishna, and the Holy Mother had to prepare food for them. Her stock of vegetables was exhausted. She had nothing left for curry but a few cast-off leaves of cabbage and some bits of vegetables not deemed good enough for the earlier meal. She was in deep perplexity, but Gopaler-Ma, a woman disciple, assured her she could make a delicious dish out of these remnants. "Very well," the Mother replied, "I will try. If it succeeds, all the merit will go to you. If it fails, the blame too will be yours." She cooked it quickly and carried it to the room of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna asked in surprise where she had found the materials for so wonderful a curry. But she could not take the praise or blame—it belonged to Gopaler-Ma!

In fact, the Holy Mother's daily programme of life at Dakshineswar was one of unremitting service and ardent practice of devotion. She would, as already stated, get up between 3 and 4 a.m., and after bathing in the Ganges, spend the morning hours in meditation and worship. For the Master used to insist on meditation both in the morning and evening.[1] Then she would attend to cooking. After that, if there were

[1] Sri Ramakrishna was always a hard taskmaster in matters spiritual. If on any day the Holy Mother and Lakshmi-Didi, who lived with her at the Nahabat, failed to get up at the usual time, he would, as he passed that way in the early morning, pour water into their bed from his water jug, so that they may get up and begin meditation.

no devotees near the Master, she would go to him and massage his body with oil. While the Master was engaged in his bath, she would prepare betel rolls. Then she would take the Master's food [1] to him, and personally serve it and stand by his side as he partook of it. For she had to engage him in some light conversation, so that his meal might not be disturbed by the sudden onset of Samadhi or any such higher mood. Besides, as in feeding a little child, she often had to have recourse to various tricks in feeding the Master. For the sight of a large quantity of food on the plate would make him nervous, and he would refuse to take it, fearing it would upset his stomach. So she would hide the real quantity of rice by pressing it down into a small heap. In the same way she would take from the milkman more than the usual half a seer of milk allotted to the Master, and boil it down into the usual quantity.[2] By adopting such

[1] As long as his mother was alive, the Master would go to the Nahabat and have his food with her. After her passing away, his food used to be served in his room.

[2] There is an interesting description she herself gave to a disciple about how she fed the Master with milk. She said, "When the Master was ill, Ganga Prasad Sen of Kumartooly was consulted. The physician prescribed some medicine and forbade water. The Master began to ask one and all, 'Well, can I live without water?' He asked this question of everyone, even of a five year old child. All replied, 'Yes, sir, you can.' 'Can I?' he asked me. 'You can,' I replied. He then said, 'You are to wipe the water from even washed pomegranate cells. See if you can do it.' At that I said to him, 'Well, everything will be done by the grace of Mother Kali. We shall try our utmost.' The Master made up his mind at last. He stopped drinking water and took the medicine. Every day I used to give him three to four seers of milk to drink—later on even five to six seers. The man who milked the temple

methods, she used to feed the Master well, and under her loving care, his health invariably improved. When such improvement became marked, he used to tell her, "Just see how I am growing fatter by taking the food cooked by you."

The feeding of the Master over, she would take some tiffin and sit for making betel rolls. During

cows used to give me milk in large quantities. He would say to me, 'If I give all this milk to the temple, the priests will take it home after worship and give it away to anyone and everyone. But if I leave the milk here, the Master will have it.' He used to give me up to five or six seers of milk. He was a good man, full of devotion. I used to give him sweets. I would boil it down to a seer and a half. The Master would ask me, 'How much milk is there?' I would say, 'A seer or a seer and a quarter.' He would remark, 'Perhaps more. I see such thick layer.'

"One day Golap (a woman disciple) was there. He asked her, 'How much milk is there?' And she told the truth. 'Ah! so much milk,' he exclaimed, 'that is why I get indigestion. Call her, call her.' I came in, and he told me of what Golap had said about the milk. I pacified him telling, 'Oh! Golap does not know the measurement. How can she know how much the pot contains?'

"Another day he asked Golap about the milk and she said in reply, 'One full bowl from here and another from the Kali temple.' At this the Master got nervous again. He sent for me, and began to ask about the exact measurement of the bowl, as to how many Paos and Chataks it contained. I replied, 'I do not know about Paos and Chataks. You will drink milk. Why all these enquiries about measurement? Who knows about all these calculations?' He was not satisfied. He said, 'Can I digest all this milk? I shall get indigestion.' Really, that day he did get indigestion. He did not take anything that night, except a little sago water.

"Golap said to me afterwards, 'Well, Mother, you should have told me about it before. How could I know? His whole evening meal is spoiled.' In reply I said to her, 'There is no harm in telling a lie about food. Thus I coax him to eat.' In this way he picked up his health and was almost cured of his illness."

that time as well as afterwards, she would sing devotional songs within herself in a low humming tune, always taking care to see that no one outside heard it. At 1 p.m. she took her midday meal and rested for a while. After that till 3 p.m. she basked in the sun and dried her hair, sitting on the steps of the Nahabat. Then she would trim the lamps for the evening, have an afternoon wash, and make things ready for cooking at night. At dusk she burnt incense before the Deity and sat for meditation. Afterwards she attended to cooking, fed the Master and his mother, took her own food, and retired to bed.[1]

Besides attending to all these regular items of work, she had to receive quite a large number of visitors in later days. For all the women disciples of the Master used to see her at the Nahabat whenever they visited Dakshineswar, and if some of them wanted to spend a night or two with her, she had to find accommodation for them.

Though her life at Dakshineswar was thus crowded with work, she felt it in no way a burden. For to be

[1] In addition to these daily duties, she used to do quite a number of odd jobs. For example, she said one day to a lady disciple: "The Master used to tell me, 'You must always be active. You should never be without work. For when one is idle, all sorts of bad thoughts crop up in the mind.' One day he gave me some hemp and asked me to prepare some string suspenders with it. He said he wanted them to hang the pots of sweets etc. with, for his young disciples. I made the suspenders accordingly, and with the fibre that was left, stuffed a pillow. I used to lie down on a stiff mat under which I spread some hessian, and placed that pillow under my head. Now you see all these beds and mattresses, but at that time I used to have the same sleep as now. I don't see any difference."

of service to the Master was her highest delight. What pained her sometimes was that she could not get sufficient opportunity to attend on him. For example, her only chance in the course of the day to stay by the Master's side was when she carried his meals to his room. Once she was unwittingly deprived of this privilege by Golap-Ma, a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Being asked by the Master to serve his food on one occasion, Golap-Ma began to do so every day afterwards, thus usurping that cherished duty of the Holy Mother and depriving her of her only opportunity of seeing the Master at close quarters. She felt very much grieved at heart for this, but kept silent, as she was never in the habit of putting forward her own claims as against those of others. For though Sri Ramakrishna was the nearest and dearest object of her heart, her pure mind was so free from any sense of monopoly over him that she recognized the equal right of everyone else to serve him.[1] It was perhaps

[1] Another incident illustrating this trait of the Holy Mother was told by Golap-Ma. One day, as the Holy Mother was bringing the Master's plate of food, she saw a lady standing near the Master's room. She hurriedly came to her and wanted to be allowed to carry the Master's food that day. The Holy Mother gladly handed over the plate to her. Afterwards, when the lady had left, and the Holy Mother was fanning the Master during his meal, he told her that he found it very difficult to take that food as the woman who carried it was not pure in life. The Holy Mother admitted that she knew about it, and requested the Master to take his food somehow that day. When she was thus appealing to him, he asked her to give word that she would never hand over his food to anybody in future. At this, the Holy Mother laid aside the fan and said with folded hands, "That I cannot; for if anyone

with reference to these days of Golap-Ma's interference that the Holy Mother said to a disciple in later times: "At that time I would see the Master perhaps once in two months. I used to console my mind by saying, 'O mind, are you so fortunate that you can see him every day?'" Sri Ramakrishna, however, came to understand her feeling and rectified the mistake.

This sensitiveness of the Master to the feelings and difficulties of the Holy Mother, in spite of the very limited occasions of personal contact between them, is something very remarkable. It is illustrative of how true spiritual love can be thoroughly impersonal and non-physical, and yet be vigilantly operative for the welfare of the object of affection.

Here are a few more illustrations of this fact from this period of the Holy Mother's life. Once Golap-Ma, of whom we spoke before, took to the habit of spending long hours with the Master in the evenings. Sometimes she would be with him till ten o'clock, and the Holy Mother had to watch over her food till then at the Nahabat. That was very inconvenient to her. One day Sri Ramakrishna heard her saying, "Let the cat or dog spoil her food; I cannot keep guard over it any more." Next day he told Golap-Ma how she was

wants something of me, I feel I must grant it. But anyway I shall try my best to carry your food myself." Sri Ramakrishna at once understood the nobility of her outlook, and said nothing more on the subject. He continued his meal, talking joyously with her on various subjects.

inconveniencing the Holy Mother by this habit, but she replied innocently, "No, the Mother loves me dearly. She calls me by my first name, as if I were her own daughter." Sri Ramakrishna, however, corrected her.

Speaking on this point, Gauri-Ma, another woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, said, "These two beings, residing only at a distance of about fifty yards, would not meet each other for long stretches of time, but in spite of it, there was much warmth between them. Once I saw how, when the mother had a headache, Sri Ramakrishna was very anxious and frequently asked Ramlal, 'O Ramlal, why has she got headache?'"

Once, in the course of a conversation about the Master, the Holy Mother said, "He was a man of perfect renunciation, but still he had his worry about me. One day he asked me, 'How much money do you need for your expenses a month?' I said, 'Just five or six rupees will suffice.' Next he asked me, 'How many Chapatis do you eat in the evening?' I almost died of shame. How could I answer that? But as he asked me again and again, I had to reply, 'Five or six.'"

The Master's solicitude for her was not confined merely to her physical welfare. For in spite of his being an ascetic, he did everything in his power to bestow on her that subtle satisfaction which a woman feels on her husband showing special consideration for her personal tastes and inclinations.

It is interesting to note how he came to divine the Holy Mother's liking for ornaments and thought it his duty to satisfy the same. To quote the Holy Mother's own words on the point, "He used to say, 'Her name is Sarada. She is the incarnation of Saraswati.[1] Therefore she likes to put on some ornaments.' Once he said to Hriday, his nephew, 'See how much money there is in your box.[2] Have some nice gold ornaments made for her.' He was then ill; still he spent three hundred rupees on those ornaments.[3] And mind you, he himself could not touch money." Referring to this, Sri Ramakrishna would sometimes jocularly remark, "Oh! I have this much of relation with her!"

The Holy Mother, no doubt, liked to put on these ornaments with which the Master presented her affectionately. But she loved him and his reputation for saintliness more than these. For one day officious Galap-Ma said to her, "Mother, Manomohan's mother says, 'He is a man of such great renunciation, and yet the Holy Mother wears

[1] Sri Ramakrishna once said to Golap-Ma regarding the Holy Mother: "She is the incarnation of Saraswati (the wisdom aspect of the Divine Mother). She is born to bestow knowledge on others. She has hidden her physical beauty lest people should look upon her with impure eyes and thus commit sin."

[2] Mathur Babu had made an arrangement by which Sri Ramakrishna used to get a pension of rupees seven from the temple funds. This used to be kept in a box.

[3] There is a tradition according to which Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of Sita at the Panchavati. He found that she was wearing bracelets with many tiny facets like those of a diamond. It was in imitation of these that he had the golden bracelets made for the Holy Mother.

ear-rings and other gold ornaments. Does it look well?'" Next morning, when Yogin-Ma, another woman disciple of the Master, visited her, she noticed that the Mother had only a pair of gold bracelets on her wrists. She had taken off all other ornaments because of the previous day's remarks. After much persuasion Yogin-Ma succeeded in making her put on the ear-rings and one or two ordinary ornaments. She never put on all of them any more, because immediately after, the Master fell ill.

In various other ways also did the Master try to please her and make her feel how close she was to his heart. Here are a few instances. Once at Dakshineswar there was a complexion contest, the competing parties being the Master himself and the son-in-law of a devotee. Both were noted for the brightness of their complexion.[1] The Master appointed the Holy Mother to be the umpire, and then he and the other competitor walked side by side on the Panchavati ground for her to see and judge. The impartial umpire that she was, she gave her verdict in favour of the other man, whom she pronounced to be a shade fairer than the Master.

Once, while the Holy Mother was with the Master at Kamarpukur, she and one of the ladies of the family were eager to go to see the performance of some strolling players, but the Master would not let

[1] In those days Sri Ramakrishna had a golden complexion. It was in later days that he became dark.

them go. When he saw how disappointed they were, he was greatly concerned and tried to console them. He himself acted out a play he had but once seen, giving the words, the songs, the music, and everything. They were so carried away by his performance that they forgot all about the one they had missed.

Another funny incident that took place at Kamarpukur may be narrated in the Mother's own words. "At Kamarpukur", she said, "Lakshmi's mother and I used to cook. She could cook very well. One day the Master and Hriday were taking their meals together. Referring to a preparation made by Lakshmi's mother, the Master said, 'O Hridu, the one who has cooked this may be compared to the physician Ramdas.' And tasting the curry prepared by me, he said, 'Ah, whoever has cooked this is Srinath Sen.' Now Ramdas was a renowned physician while Srinath Sen was only a quack. So he meant that Lakshmi's mother was an expert and I only an amateur. At this Hriday said, 'What you say is true. But you can get your "Srinath Sen" at all times. She can render you all kinds of service, even massage your feet. You have only to send for her and she comes. But physician Ramdas takes a big fee for his visit. Besides, you cannot get him at all hours. Further, people at first consult a quack. This quack is your friend at all times.' The Master said, 'That's true, that's true. She is always available.'"

Amidst all this gay talk and the familiar relationship of everyday life, the Master always maintained an attitude of perfect reverence towards the Holy Mother. He never failed to notice the core of purity and spiritual power that lay behind her veil of modesty and meekness. He looked upon her as a divine being—as a veritable embodiment of Saraswati, the Goddess of learning—born to confer knowledge on mankind. He knew that, being his Shakti, she would have to continue his spiritual ministry, and commissioned her to do accordingly. "The people round about live like worms in darkness," he said to her. "You should look after them." In his own lifetime he asked one of his young disciples, Sarada Prasanna, who came to be known as Swami Trigunatita in later days, to take initiation from her, telling him by means of a Vaishnava couplet[1] that her spiritual power was no less than his own. When the wife of Kalipada Ghose approached him for some spiritual aid to convert her husband from evil ways, the Master directed her to the Holy Mother. By the Mother's blessing the conversion did take place, and Kalipada became one of the great lay devotees of the Master. He imparted to her all

[1] The couplet that the Master sang runs:

अनन्त राधार् माया कहने ना याय्। कोटि कृष्ण कोटि राम् हय् याय् रय्।

"Infinite and inscrutable is the Maya of Radha. Crores of Krishnas and crores of Ramas are brought forth, sustained and dissolved (by it)."

the great Mantras that he had made dynamic by his austerities and devout contemplation, leaving instruction with her to initiate people with these. While speaking about her way of initiation, she said in later days, "I have received all these Mantras from the Master himself. Through these one is sure to achieve perfection." In his last days at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna said to her very feelingly, "Well, won't you do anything? Am I to do all?" To this the Holy Mother replied, "I am a woman. What can I do?" But the Master said, "No, no. You have much to do." It was due to his vivid perception of her mission in life that he sought so much to bring her into close contact with his select devotees like Latu, Yogen, Rakhal and Narendra, besides the numerous women devotees who flocked to him. Through this close association with devotees the Master developed in her a better realization of her grave responsibilities as his spiritual counterpart and released her latent sense of motherliness towards all beings. She could therefore say, when questioned by a devotee why she survived the Master, "You must be aware that the Master looked upon all in the world as Mother. He left me behind for demonstrating that Motherhood to the world."

Being aware of her great spiritual powers, he was very particular to shield her from slights or insults, because he knew that, if her anger was really roused, it would have very serious consequences

on those who caused it. Once Hriday showed disrespect to the Holy Mother in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna. She bore it calmly and returned to the Nahabat. Sri Ramakrishna, anxious for Hriday's welfare, said to him, "Well, you often slight me. But don't you do that with her. You may be saved if the being that resides in this body (*i.e.* in him) 'raises its hood', but if the being that is in her is angry, even Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara won't be able to save you."[1]

In his own conduct the Master was always careful to see that he did not wound her feelings or even go against her wishes when she gave positive expression to any, as it sometimes happened on questions of fundamental principles. We shall give some instances of this. In those days many devotees brought large quantities of sweets and fruits to Sri Ramakrishna. The Holy Mother, who was very generous by nature, would keep a little of it for the Master and practically none for herself, and distribute nearly the whole of it among the devotees and the children of the neighbourhood. One day the Master saw this, and interpreting it as a sign of extravagance, said to her in a complaining tone, "How can you manage, if you spend in this manner?" In spite of all her submissiveness to the Master, her feelings were a little wounded at these words, because they seemed to question that magnanimity

[1] Hriday did not, however, profit by this instruction. The consequences of it will be seen in chap. IX.

and liberality of nature which were hers as the mother of all. So she was seen to walk away from the place with a grave face. The Master at once understood the situation, and called out rather nervously to his nephew, "Look here, Ramlal, go and pacify your aunt. If she is angry, I shall be undone."

To cite another instance, an old woman used to visit the Holy Mother at the Nahabat and spend long hours in conversation with her. The woman had led an unclean life. Sri Ramakrishna knew this, and told the Mother that it was not quite desirable for her to associate with her. What exactly his idea was in assuming such an attitude is difficult to say; for he knew very well that the Holy Mother was above every possibility of corruption. Probably his idea was that it might set a bad example to his women devotees, and make them unmindful of maintaining the sanctity of the home atmosphere. Whatever that might be, his wish on this point clashed with the Holy Mother's attitude of motherly sympathy for all, whether good or bad. So, as Yogin-Ma noticed, when in spite of the Master's prohibition, that woman continued to visit her now and then, addressing her as 'Mother', she would, with great maternal affection, make her sit, talk to her kindly, and give her something or other to eat. Sri Ramakrishna noticed all this, but did not comment on it or show any annoyance. By nature he never tolerated any wrong action on the part of his

devotees and his acquiescence in the Holy Mother's conduct in this respect means that he understood the depth of her sentiment and approved of it in his heart of hearts.[1]

At one time a woman unknown to any of the devotees used to visit the Master. She was at first taken to be mad, but afterwards it turned out that she was a follower of the path of Madhura Bhava (conjugal relation with the Deity). One day she indiscreetly proposed to the Master that she be allowed to maintain towards him the peculiar mental attitude sanctioned by her sect. This irritated him very much, and he began to abuse her loudly. The Holy Mother was hearing all this from the Nahabat, and she blushed as a mother would do if her daughter were insulted in her presence. She at once sent Golap-Ma to fetch the woman to her, with the remark, "Just see, even if she had said anything indiscreet, he could have sent her to me instead of abusing her in this manner." When Golap-Ma brought the woman, the Mother received her very kindly and said to her, "My daughter, if he feels annoyed at your presence there, you can very well come to me."

Another instance illustrating the same point took place in connection with the feeding of young devotees. In later days several of them used to spend

[1] Cf. also the example of a woman taking away the plate of food for the Master from the Holy Mother's hand, mentioned a few paragraphs above.

their nights occasionally with the Master with a view to practising meditation during the night under his guidance. Knowing that overeating would stand in the way of meditation, the Master had strictly regulated the number of Chapatis allowed to each according to his physical capacities. One day he asked Baburam (later Swami Premananda) as to how many pieces he was taking at night. On being told that he was taking five or six, the Master said it was too much, and asked him why he did so. Baburam answered that he took whatever the Holy Mother gave him. At this the Master went to the Holy Mother and said complainingly that she would spoil the spiritual prospect of those young men by overfeeding them. But the Holy Mother replied, "Why do you worry so much because he has eaten two Chapatis more? I shall look after their welfare. You need not find fault with them for eating." Evidently the mother in her could not feel content without feeding her children to their satisfaction. The Master understood the point and laughed away the whole affair.

Thus the Master showed the utmost deference to the Holy Mother's wishes on fundamental questions, and while receiving her loving service and moving with her in all frankness and childish joviality, he always maintained an attitude of profound respect towards her as his spiritual counterpart and the fulfiller of his life's mission. This attitude was often implicit, but sometimes it expressed itself in

striking little actions. One day the Holy Mother entered the Master's room with his meal. He thought it was his niece Lakshmi and asked her in a careless way to shut the door. In doing so he used the word 'tui'—an expression meaning 'thou' but used only for addressing a junior or an inferior person. When the Holy Mother responded, saying that she was doing so, the Master felt very much embarrassed, and said, "Ah! is it you? I thought it was Lakshmi. Please forgive me." The Holy Mother replied that it did not matter at all, and that there was nothing wrong in his addressing her as he did Lakshmi. But the Master was not quite satisfied. Next morning he went to the Nahabat and said to the Holy Mother, "Well, I couldn't sleep at all last night. I was so worried because I spoke to you rudely." Referring to this, the Holy Mother often said in later times, especially when she was worried or treated disrespectfully by some of her senseless relations, "I was married to a husband who never addressed me as 'tui'. Ah! how he treated me. Not even once did he tell me a harsh word or wound my feelings! He did not strike me even with a flower!"

The Holy Mother in turn reciprocated a hundredfold this regard and reverence that the Master showed her. This she did, not only by the loving and reverential service she rendered to him every day, but by the way in which she turned her thoughts and aspirations to the dominant note of his life.

There is no better way in which the wife of a great man can show her love and regard for her husband than by cultivating such a spontaneous and whole-hearted receptivity to his ideals and thus becoming his helpmate in the fulfilment of his life's mission. We have already seen how the Holy Mother proved herself worthy of her great husband in respect of divine love and control over the senses. To complete the picture, we may mention here another striking incident illustrating how deeply she had absorbed the Master's ideal of renunciation. Among the Master's devotees there was a rich Marwari merchant named Lakshminarayan. One day, finding the Master's bed-sheet unwashed, he wanted to deposit ten thousand rupees in his name, so that from the interest of it all his personal needs might be met. The living embodiment of renunciation that he was, Sri Ramakrishna could not brook the proposal, and he requested the merchant never to mention such a thing in his presence. As a test, perhaps, the Master directed the merchant to the Holy Mother, telling him that he might give the amount to her if she had no objection to accept it. But the Holy Mother rejected the proposal, saying that if she accepted the money it would be as good as his accepting it, because all the amount will then go only to his service. It is said the Master was very much pleased with the reply.

In later days the Holy Mother always spoke of the Master as pre-eminently a teacher of renunciation.

One day a disciple said to her, "Mother, what a unique thing our Master gave to the world! He has established the harmony of all religions." To this the Mother replied: "My child, what you say about the harmony of religions is true. But it never seemed to me that he had practised the different religions with any definite motive of preaching the harmony of religions. Day and night he remained overwhelmed with the ecstatic thought of God. He enjoyed the sport of the Divine by practising spiritual disciplines, following the paths of the Vaishnavas, Christians, Mussalmans and the rest. But it seems to me, my child, that the special feature of the Master's life is his renunciation. Has any one ever seen such natural renunciation?" As she said to another, renunciation was his ornament.

Once a niece of hers, when taken to task by her for her worldly attachment, retorted that she (the Holy Mother) had not known the value of a husband. The Holy Mother's reply was very significant. "Yes," she said with pride, "my husband was a naked fakir!"

One may conclude the account of the conjugal life of this holy couple by briefly recapitulating its principal features that make it an object-lesson to humanity. In the Holy Mother we find a combination of an ideal wife and disciple. Her highest delight consisted in serving her husband heart and soul without any consideration of personal

difficulties. For her it was neither a slavish drudgery nor the conventional fulfilment of an obligation. Self-abnegation, modesty, submissiveness—these, no doubt, were in ample evidence in her conduct, but they were in her case the very antipodes of slavishness and conventionality in so far as they formed the expression of deepest love and remained consistent with a dignified pursuit of principles.

Her participation in her husband's life was not confined to mere external service of him. She grasped the central principle of his life and made it a part and parcel of her own self. So well did she absorb 'them that she ever remained a help, never a hindrance, to him in the realization of his life's mission. As such, she won her husband's unqualified love and respect.

And withal the most wonderful thing is that this holy couple could set so perfect an example of married love, and yet be free from the least taint of corporeal passion. In fact, it is the great lesson of their lives that in the highest specimens of humanity, love is not dependent on sex or any consideration of physical intimacy. Many a modern thinker on questions of sex-life is disposed to separate the life of love from the function of procreation and invest the former with an independent value in itself, in spite of the association one finds between them in nature. Even a Christian writer like Nicholas Berdyaev argues that to make love dependent on, or subordinate to, procreation is to transfer the principle of

cattle breeding to human relation. He may or may not be right in this view. Many who hold the cultivation of holiness as the highest ideal of life might have agreed with this view if such thinkers had admitted the possibility of transcending the instinctive side of sex in a perfect union of souls. But they are particular in insisting that love between the sexes can never be perfect without physical expression. For example, Edward Carpenter remarks on this subject: "But equally absurd is any attempt to limit (love) . . . to the spiritual, with a somewhat lofty contempt for the material—in which case it tends . . . to become too like trying to paint a picture without the use of pigments. All the phases are necessary, or at least desirable—even if . . . a quite complete and all-round relation is seldom realized." [1]

The conjugal life of the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna contradicts this view and sets another norm, at least for the noblest of mankind. For those in whom consciousness is yet centred in the body, love without sex may be like painting without pigment. But there are men and women who transcend the body-consciousness and realize the Self behind it. If they happen to paint the life of love as an example for humanity, the pigment they use is not sex but the Self. The Upanishads recognize it when they say: "It is not for the sake of the husband that the husband is loved, but it is for the

[1] Edward Carpenter: *The Drama of Love and Death.*

sake of the Self that he is loved. It is not for the sake of the wife that the wife is loved, but it is for the sake of the Self that she is loved. It is not for the sake of the sons that the sons are loved, but it is for the sake of the Self that the sons are loved" (*Brihadaranyakopanishad* I, IV, 5).

A perfect example of this principle is furnished by the life of the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna. In their case both stood for a common ideal of great sublimity, each helped to elicit the best that was in the other, and both found perfect satisfaction in mutual service, without the aid of any corporeal passion to hold them together in love and amity. If one enquires as to what constituted the cementing principle in this perfect union, one arrives at the Self, of which everything else is but a reflection.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE PASSING OF EVENTS

DURING the period of thirteen years that the Holy Mother spent at Dakshineswar, there were several events in her life that had no direct bearing on her relation with Sri Ramakrishna. It is necessary to make a rapid survey of these events in order to complete this period of her life. In the course of these years, she went at least seven times from Dakshineswar to Jayrambati and back. One need not note the dates of these visits except a few which are connected with important incidents in her life.

Her stay at Dakshineswar on the first occasion lasted for about a year and a half. In October, 1873, nearly one and a half years after her first arrival at Dakshineswar, she returned to Jayrambati. Within a few months of this, her aged father Ramachandra Mukherji died, on the 26th April, 1874. His death put the family into great financial difficulty. The income from priestly duties with which Ramachandra used to supplement the all too inadequate returns of his paddy fields, was now completely stopped. Not only that; even the yield of the paddy fields

diminished for want of efficient supervision. The four sons of Ramachandra, the younger brothers of the Holy Mother, were too young, and even the eldest of them had not yet completed his priestly education. The whole responsibility of the family, therefore, fell upon their widowed mother Syamasundari Devi. She was, however, a very resourceful and energetic woman, and refused to be overwhelmed by these adverse circumstances. To supplement the meagre income of the family, she began to husk paddy for the Banerji family of the neighbourhood, and as for the education of her children, she sent three of them to the houses of her relatives who undertook to teach them.

In those trying days her daughter Sarada (the Holy Mother) was a great source of strength to her. Not only did she encourage her mother by her advice and companionship, but relieved her of much heavy labour by doing herself the hard manual work of husking, by which the family now earned its precarious living.

As time went on, conditions improved a little. The eldest of the brothers, Prasanna Kumar, having completed his education, began to earn something, though small, by priestly work in Calcutta. The two other brothers next to him in age, Kali Kumar and Barada Prasad, became useful in the management of their lands, while the youngest, Abhay Charan, who was the most intelligent among them all, was sent for school education through the help

of some kind friends.[1] Eventually he qualified himself as a medical man, but, as we shall see, met with premature death. The Holy Mother took a considerable interest in the fortunes of all these brothers; for her life was inextricably connected with theirs. As the eldest girl of the family, she was their nurse in their infancy and they all grew up under her charge. Even in later life they always looked up to her for help and guidance.

The improvement in the material condition of the Holy Mother's family is also associated with the institution of Jagaddhatri Puja in their home some time after the demise of Ramachandra Mukherji. Once at the village Kali Puja conducted by one Nava Mukherji, that gentleman, owing to some quarrel with the Holy Mother's family, refused to accept the rice that Syamasundari Devi had vowed to the Deity. The poor lady was much aggrieved at it, and spent a whole night weeping. She was at a loss to decide what she should do with the rice set apart for the Deity. She was, however, relieved of her grief and worry when at night she saw in a vision the Deity as Jagaddhatri asking her to offer to Her the rice she had vowed to Kali. From that day the

[1] About the education of this brother the Holy Mother said in later days: "My youngest brother had passed the matriculation examination. He was very well up in the school, and then he studied medicine. After Naren met him, he said of him, 'I never knew that Mother had such an intelligent brother. The others are all like ordinary priests.' Yogen defrayed his educational expenses, and then Yogen died. Rakhal paid forty rupees for his books." This brother was the father of Radhu who, as we shall see, played such an important role in the latter part of the Holy Mother's life.

idea of worshipping Jagaddhatri became an obsession with her. Although in straitened circumstances, she performed the worship with due *eclat*, meeting the expenses of it from the sale of a quantity of paddy she secured from a neighbouring house. Next year Syamasundari Devi wanted to perform the worship again and asked the Holy Mother to help her in making preparations. But the Holy Mother objected to it, saying that it had been done once and that there was no need to bother themselves again with all the heavy work involved in it.

"That night", said the Holy Mother in later days, "I saw in a dream that three of them arrived—Jagaddhatri and Her two companions, Jaya and Vijaya. I remember it distinctly. They said to me, 'Shall we go away then?' 'Who are you all?' I asked. One of them said, 'I am Jagaddhatri.' In reply I said, 'No, why should you go? Stay here. I did not ask you to go away.'"

From that time onwards the Jagaddhatri Puja became an annual function in the Holy Mother's home, and she used to take a leading part in arranging for the celebration. As she said later on: "Since that time I have been going home as far as possible every year at the time of the Jagaddhatri Puja. I am to help in polishing the utensils and look after other things. Formerly there were not many people in the family. I would go home to cleanse the pots and pans. Later Yogen (Swami Yogananda) got a set of wooden utensils. He said to me, 'Mother,

you do not have to scour pots and pans any more.' He also secured a piece of land to provide for the expenses of the Puja."[1]

Shortly after her father's death the Holy Mother came back to Dakshineswar about April, 1874. It was on this occasion that Shambhu Mallick built a small cottage for her. She lived in it only for about a year; for, as already said, she had to come back to the Nahabat in order to nurse Sri Ramakrishna during an attack of dysentery. The Master was soon cured, but the Holy Mother in turn suffered from an attack of the same illness. It was dysentery of a very virulent type, and only with the best medical help rendered to her by the devoted Shambu Mallick could she get a little relief from it. When she was better, she went to Jayrambati in September, 1875. Unfortunately, after her arrival there, she had a severe relapse. Her mother and brothers treated and nursed her to the best of their capacity, but everyone doubted whether she would recover at all. Even the Master felt anxious on hearing of her condition, and remarked sorrowfully to Hriday, "Is she born only to die? Is she not destined to gain the end of human life?"

[1] This worship of Jagaddhatri is still continued at Jayrambati. The function is now organized and performed not by any of the members of the Holy Mother's family, but by the branch of the Ramakrishna Math established at the birth-place of the Holy Mother. In the later days of her life, the Holy Mother purchased three acres of agricultural land for meeting the expenses of the annual worship. According to the stipulation of Swami Saradananda, this land is in the possession of the families of the Holy Mother's brothers, but they are to contribute a fixed quantity of paddy every year for the worship.

In this extremity, the Holy Mother decided on a bold measure. Since all human remedies had failed, she would now try the chance of obtaining some divine aid. In the neighbourhood of her home there was the temple of the Divine Mother in Her aspect as Simhavahini. She decided to go there and perform the rite of Hatya, according to which one was to lie before the Deity giving up food and drink, with the determination to starve to death if no divine remedy was revealed. Her condition was now desperate. In consequence of the dysentery, her whole body was swollen. Her nose and eyes were running, and by constant loss of tears she was practically blind, even a full moon night being, as she said, absolutely dark to her. In that condition, unknown to her mother and brothers, she went into the temple with the help of a friend and laid herself down before the Deity in a mood of supplication. We have it on her own authority that within a short time the Goddess revealed two medicines—one to her mother for the dysentery and the other to herself for the trouble in the eye.[1] Both the medicines were tried. As a result she got back her eyesight that very day while her other ailments disappeared in a short time.[2]

[1] As regards the medicine revealed to her, she said, "I heard the Goddess say to me, 'Press out the juice of the gourd flower, mix it with salt, and apply it drop by drop to your eye.'"

[2] Since that time Simhavahini of Jayrambati has become a living Goddess. People have a strong faith that great power is manifested through the Deity in that temple. While before the

Next year the Holy Mother again fell ill, this time of malaria with enlargement of the spleen. Her mother took her for treatment to a quack in the neighbouring village of Koyapat. This man's peculiar way of treatment consisted in branding the region of the spleen with burning plum wood, keeping a kind of green leaf over the surface to be branded. He also introduced a religious element into his system of spleen therapeutics, as he administered his treatment within the precincts of the Siva temple of Badanganj in the name of the Deity. The Holy Mother was subjected to this operation. We do not know what curative effect it had on her, but it is known that she bore the painful operation calmly and did not require any one to hold fast her limbs, as it had always to be done in the case of the other patients of this physician.

She went to Dakshineswar for the third time in January, 1877. Chandra Devi, her mother-in-law, who had been residing at Dakshineswar, had passed away in the meantime.

Her fourth visit to Dakshineswar took place in February, 1881. Unfortunately the occasion was marred by the insolent conduct of Hriday towards the Holy Mother and her party. The respect which

cure of the Holy Mother very few used to visit the temple, now many people hailing even from distant parts go there on the special days of the week. Pilgrims carry earth from the foot of the shrine, thus causing a pit of considerable size to be formed. This earth is supposed to possess great curative power. Members of the Holy Mother's family officiate in this temple.

everyone in the temple showed him, and the consciousness that even Sri Ramakrishna was under his control, had of late brought about a transformation in Hriday. His greed had increased, and he had begun to bid openly for people's respect by posing as a saint. Proud, haughty and overbearing, he got into the habit of insulting everyone he came in contact with, including even Sri Ramakrishna. In the blindness and folly of this new mood, he lost his old love for the Master, and even seemed to entertain a grudge against him for his rejection of Lakshminarayan's offer of ten thousand rupees. As a consequence he began to oppress and tease him in various ways. Sri Ramakrishna, however, put up with all his overweening behaviour, considering the great services he had rendered him in the past.

It was in the days when Hriday was on the war path that the fourth visit of the Holy Mother to Dakshineswar took place. To narrate the events in her own words: "I came to Dakshineswar for the fourth time with mother, Lakshmi and several other women. I had vowed an offering to Siva of Tarakeswar during my previous illness. I redeemed that vow on our way to Dakshineswar. We spent the first night in Calcutta. It was spring time. The next day we came to Dakshineswar. At the sight of us, Hriday said, 'Why have you come here? What's your business?' He was discourteous to us. Hriday and my mother hailed from the same village; so he showed her scant respect. Displeased at his

behaviour, my mother said, 'Let us go back. With whom shall I leave my daughter?' The Master, afraid of Hriday, did not say 'yes' or 'no', though he heard and saw everything.[1] All of us started back for Jayrambati that same day. While leaving the place I said to myself, addressing Mother Kali in the temple, 'O Mother, I shall come here again if you deign to bring me back.' Shortly after, Hriday was sent away from the Kali temple, because he worshipped the daughter of Trailokya (son of Mathur Babu), placing flowers at her feet.[2] Ramlal, the Master's nephew, became the permanent priest of the Kali temple. That turned his head! He began to neglect the Master. The Master would be lying down somewhere, in an ecstatic mood, and his food would dry up. There was no one else in the Kali temple to look after him. So whenever anyone came to our part of the country from Dakshineswar,

[1] The Master's conduct on this occasion is a little puzzling. Perhaps he maintained this attitude, knowing full well that it would lead to endless quarrels and insults if they were asked to stay there against Hriday's will. And, perhaps he also foresaw that Hriday's days at Dakshineswar were fast coming to a close.

[2] Trailokya, the proprietor of the temple, belonged to a lower caste. It is believed that if a Brahmin worshipped a girl of lower caste in that way, she would become a widow. Hence the proprietor was angry with Hriday and dismissed him immediately from his position as the priest of Kali, with the order that he should never enter the precincts of the temple. It is to be noted that this misfortune befell Hriday, not long after his insulting the Holy Mother. Hriday's life afterwards was miserable, compared with his earlier days, and he himself came to repent of his conduct. In this connection may be remembered the Master's words, quoted earlier, that one might insult him (the Master) with impunity, but dire consequences would befall one who did the same with the Holy Mother.

the Master would request me through him to come. Once he sent me a message through Lakshman of Kamarpukur, 'I am in difficulty here. Ramlal, since becoming a priest, has joined other priests of the temple. He does not look after me much. Please be sure to come. Take a litter, a palanquin, or any other conveyance. I shall bear the cost whatever it is—be it ten rupees or twenty rupees or more.' At last I came to Dakshineswar after an absence of about a year (February, 1882)."

Subsequently, she had occasion to return to Dakshineswar only twice (in 1884 and 1885) during the Master's lifetime. There are no events worth recording in connection with these visits, except that at the time of the visit in 1884, Sri Ramakrishna had an accident resulting in a dislocation in the left arm.

It was during one of these several visits of the Holy Mother to Dakshineswar that an event, revealing certain striking features of her character, took place.[1] She was then travelling on foot, along with a party consisting of some of her relatives and several others, both men and women. In those days people travelling from Jayrambati to Calcutta had first of all to go up to Arambag, then proceed to Tarakeswar, passing through the wilderness of Telobhelo and Kaikala for about ten miles, and

[1] We cannot conclusively say on which occasion this event took place, except that it could not have been during the first or the fourth visit.

from there go to Baidyabati and cross the Ganges. The wilderness referred to was in those days infested by dacoits, and even today in the middle of it one can see a terrible image of Kali, to whom the dacoits at one time used to make human sacrifices. On this occasion, the Holy Mother's party was crossing the wilderness towards the evening with a view to reaching Tarakeswar before nightfall. As there was not much time left for the approach of night, the party was proceeding rather fast, but the Holy Mother, who was already tired, lagged behind. Twice her companions waited for her, but on finding her still lagging behind, they told her that, if they proceeded at that rate, they would not be able to cross the wilderness even by the close of the first quarter of the night, and that consequently all would fall a prey to the dacoits. The Holy Mother did not want that others should risk their lives for her sake. She asked them, therefore, to proceed without waiting for her, and agreed to meet them at a particular shop at Tarakeswar.

The party soon passed out of sight. The Holy Mother walked as fast as she could, but being very tired, could not proceed much farther than the middle of the wilderness by nightfall. She was now filled with fear and did not know what to do. Just then she saw a tall man of very dark complexion coming towards her, with a long staff resting on his shoulder. At a little distance behind him was

another, who seemed to be his companion. Within a short time the man drew near her and called out to her in a harsh voice, "Who is standing there at this time of the night?"

Though terror-stricken, the Holy Mother now showed great resourcefulness and presence of mind. She replied to him in an appealing tone, "Dear father, my companions have all gone away leaving me here. I seem also to have lost my way in the darkness. Would you please help me to reach my companions? Your 'son-in-law' is staying at Rasmani's temple at Dakshineswar. I am going to meet him. If you accompany me so far, he will be highly pleased with you."

By this time the second person also came up. The Holy Mother now understood that it was a woman and the wife of the man with the staff. She, therefore, felt very much encouraged, and approaching the woman and holding her by the hand, said, "Mother, I am your daughter Sarada. I am in great difficulty. Fortunately father and yourself have come here. Otherwise I do not know what I would have done."

The Holy Mother's gentle words, her simplicity and innocent behaviour, her perfect trust and fearlessness—all made a deep impression on the man and his wife. They felt a parental affection for her and consoled her as they would do their own daughter. As she was very much tired, they did not allow her to proceed that night. They took

her to a small shop in the village of Telobhelo and gave her some refreshments. The woman then made a bed for her with her own clothes and protected her the whole night like her own daughter.

Next morning they took her to Tarakeswar and made arrangements for her food and accommodation in a shop. Her companions, who had gone in advance of her the previous evening, met her in that shop. She introduced the couple, her new 'father' and 'mother', to them and told them of the great service they had rendered her. Some time later, after having finished worship in the temple and taken food and rest, she took leave of her benefactors tearfully, and accompanied the party to Baidyabati.

Referring to this incident, the Holy Mother used to say in later days: "In one night we became so intimate that, when we parted, I began to weep. With great difficulty I came away from them. I requested them again and again to meet me at Dakshineswar, whenever they found it convenient. They accompanied me for a considerable distance. The woman then collected some peas from a wayside field and tying them to my cloth, said with tears in her eyes, 'Daughter Sarada, when you take popped rice at night, use these also with it.' They also came to Dakshineswar several times with sweets. The Master, hearing the whole story from me, behaved towards them very cordially

like a son-in-law. My surmise is that though these people are now good and gentle, my 'dacoit father' must have committed many highway robberies."

CHAPTER X

THE MASTER'S DEMISE AND AFTER

THE happy days of the Holy Mother at Dakshineswar were now drawing to a close. In the summer of 1885 the Master fell ill of cancer in the throat, and by September he was taken to Syampukur, Calcutta, for treatment. After this, the Holy Mother continued to stay at Dakshineswar for some time more. It was during these days when she had comparative leisure that she learnt reading from a girl of Bhava Mukherji's family.

While the Holy Mother was thus staying alone at Dakshineswar, her heart, already grief-stricken at the Master's illness, was tormented by a cruel remark made unwittingly by her dear companion, Golap-Ma. In the course of a conversation with Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma remarked that the Master left Dakshineswar, probably because he was annoyed with the Holy Mother. This officious conjecture of Golap-Ma reached the Holy Mother's ears. She felt stabbed in her heart, as it were. Unable to bear the grief, she went immediately to Calcutta in a carriage, and with tears in her eyes, asked the Master about the truth of Golap-Ma's statement. The Master

consoled her very tenderly, saying that the statement was absolutely untrue, and sent her back to Dakshineswar in a peaceful mood. He then sent for Golap-Ma, scolded her severely for her false and mischievous surmise, and asked her to beg the Holy Mother's forgiveness. Golap-Ma, full of repentance, walked at once to Dakshineswar, and weepingly implored the Holy Mother to pardon her. But the Mother, who never bore enmity to any one, laughed out without saying a word. She gently patted Golap-Ma thrice on the back addressing her, and the poor lady felt all her grief assuaged.

After the Master's departure from Dakshineswar, the Holy Mother did not continue to stay there long. The devotees who had undertaken the responsibility of the Master's care and treatment at Calcutta began to feel the pressing need of an expert hand for preparing his diet and feeding him. They could think of no better person than the Holy Mother, but they felt that, with her characteristic bashfulness, it would be impossible for her to stay among so many men at that rented house at Syampukur, which had no women's quarters attached to it. Anyway, with the Master's permission, they carried the suggestion to the Holy Mother, and were surprised to note that she readily agreed, the thought of serving the Master being enough in her case to drive away all consideration of personal convenience. She therefore shifted to the Syampukur house without delay. A small shed on the terrace, the only place in that house

where there was some privacy, was allotted to her. There she stayed all through the day and cooked the Master's diet, coming down only to feed him or otherwise attend on him. At such times she would send word through Gopal Senior or Latu—the two disciples with whom alone she talked directly—to clear the room of all people. As there was only one bath room, she would get up at 3 a.m. before anybody was up, and after attending to personal needs, quietly slip into her shed. At night everyone retired to bed by 11 o'clock, and then she would come to a room in the second storey to snatch a few hours of sleep. Thus silently she spent day after day at Syampukur in the service of the Master, fervently hoping that he would in the end be cured.

Sri Ramakrishna was brought to Syampukur in September, 1885. He stayed there only for about three months. The house was in many respects inconvenient, and besides, the doctors suggested a change to some place outside the city. So a garden-house was secured at Cossipore, and the Master was taken there on the 11th December, 1885. The Holy Mother also accompanied him, and as at Syampukur, busied herself in cooking for the Master and in nursing him.

There are only a few incidents to record relating to this period of her life. One day Niranjan and some other young disciples were going to take date juice from a tree in the compound. The Master was then in a very bad condition and could not even

move about without help. But to her surprise the Holy Mother noticed him running out of the room that day. She, therefore, went to his room to see what the matter was. It was empty, and within a short time she found the Master returning. When she spoke to him about the same incident next day, he said, "Oh! It is all your imagination! Your brain must have been heated by too much cooking!" But it appears, that on being further pressed for an explanation, he said that there was a cobra under the date tree from which the boys were going to take the juice, and that in order to protect them, he had, by his higher powers, gone to the place in advance and driven the cobra away. His making light of the incident at first was perhaps to discourage too much importance being paid to such happenings.

The devotees had made unstinting arrangements for the treatment of the Master at the Cossipore Garden. Dr. Mahendra Nath Sirkar, one of the best medical men of Calcutta, was engaged for treatment, and several of the Master's young devotees stayed day and night with him for nursing him. But it became increasingly clear to all that all effort was in vain. Besides what they could infer from the slowly deteriorating condition of the Master, the Holy Mother and the devotees had indications of the coming end from the fulfilment of certain predictions that the Master had made. They had already been warned by the Master some time back that they must be prepared for his

approaching end, when they found him spending nights at Calcutta, accepting food indiscriminately and eating preparations left after distribution to others, and receiving the adoration of a large number of people as a manifestation of the deity. The first of these conditions was fulfilled even before he left Dakshineswar, and the last one, too, was now found to be coming true. This was brought to the notice of the Holy Mother by a striking incident. Some devotees went to Dakshineswar to see the Master, but were disappointed to learn that he had left for Calcutta for treatment. They had brought some sweets to present to the Master, but as he was away, they made an offering of it before his picture and partook of the prasad. When this incident was reported to the Holy Mother at Cossipore, she recalled the Master's prediction and her mind was filled with forebodings of the coming end.

In spite of the best medical aid and the careful nursing by his young disciples and the Holy Mother, the Master's illness showed no signs of improvement. When all treatment had failed, the Holy Mother decided to invoke divine aid. She went to the temple of Siva at Tarakeswar and lay before the Deity for two days without food and drink, supplicating for some divine remedy for the Master's illness. "During the night of the second day," she said, referring to this incident, "I was startled to hear a sound. It was as if some one was breaking a pile of earthen pots with one blow. I woke from my torpor

and the idea flashed in my mind, 'Who is husband and who is wife? Who is my relative in this world? Why am I about to kill myself?' All my attachment for the Master disappeared. My mind was filled with utter renunciation. I groped through darkness and sprinkled my face with holy water from the pit at the back of the temple. I also drank a little water as my throat was parched with thirst. I felt refreshed. The next morning I came to the Cossipore Garden. No sooner had the Master seen me than he asked, 'Well, did you get anything? Well, everything is unreal. Isn't it?'"

"At about the same time," she said, "the Master saw in a dream that an elephant had gone out to bring medicine for him. The animal was digging the earth to procure it, when he woke up. The Master asked me whether I had seen any such dream. I had seen in a dream that the neck of the image of Mother Kali was bent to one side. I asked Her, 'Mother, why do you stand like that?' And the Deity replied, 'It is because of this (pointing to the cancer in the throat of the Master). I also have it in my throat.'"

Such experiences must have gradually prepared her mind for the coming end. To confirm this impression, as it were, the Master one day called the Holy Mother to his side and said: "I do not know why the thoughts of Brahman are stirring my mind." It was a hint that his consciousness was getting identified with Brahman. He took final leave of her on the 15th of August, when the Mother was

standing by his emaciated body with her niece Lakshmi. All had thought that the power of speech had left him, but he whispered to the Mother: "Look here. It seems I am going somewhere—all through water to a far off place. You need have no anxiety. You will be just as you have been so long. Naren and others will look after you and do for you as much as they have done for me. Do have an eye on dear Lakshmi."

The Master left his mortal body in the early hours of Monday, the 16th August, 1886, creating in the mind of the Holy Mother and the devotees a gap that could never be filled by anything else on earth. But men never die in an absolute sense, much less great souls of the type of the Master. This was borne out by the following incident. After his cremation, the Holy Mother was removing her ornaments, as Hindu widows do on their husbands' death. When she was about to put off her bracelets, she had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna appearing before her[1] and saying to this effect: "What are you doing? I have not gone away. I have only passed from one room to another." A vision of this kind must have been very reassuring to her grief-stricken heart.

Shortly after, Balaram Babu purchased a white cloth without borders, the widow's garment, for the Holy Mother, and requested Golap-Ma to hand it

[1] Such experiences were repeated in her life as we shall see later on.

over to her. Golap-Ma, thinking of the sudden reaction it may have on the Holy Mother, remarked, "O my God! who can give this white borderless cloth to her now?" But when she went to the Holy Mother with the cloth, she found that she had already torn off the greater part of the wide red borders of her Sari. From that time onward she always used to wear a cloth with thin borders in recognition of the Master's assurance that there was no death for him and therefore no widowhood for her.

Several of the householder devotees of the Master wanted to break up the establishment at Cossipore Garden, immediately after the Master's passing away. But Narendra Nath (later Swami Vivekananda) and other young disciples protested against this, as it would be a great shock to the Holy Mother to be asked to leave that place so soon. They wanted that she should be allowed to stay there for a few days more, and even offered to beg food for her, if necessary. So the establishment was retained for some days and the Master's earthly relics were worshipped in that house with food offerings. On the 21st of August, the Holy Mother and Lakshmi-Didi, the Master's niece, were conducted to the house of Balaram Bose. Along with them was also brought the urn containing the major part of the Master's relics. For a dispute had in the meantime arisen regarding its disposal between some of the householder devotees headed by Ramachandra Datta, and

the young Sannyasin disciples. The Sannyasins wanted the relics to be in their possession, but the other party desired to install them permanently in a garden belonging to Ramachandra Datta. It was finally decided to hand over the pitcher containing the relics to Ramachandra, but the Sannyasins in the meantime had taken away the main portion and put it in the urn referred to above. When the Holy Mother heard of this dispute, she remarked to Golap-Ma, "Such a unique personality has passed away. But, see, dear Golap, how they are quarrelling over his ashes!"

CHAPTER XI

PILGRIMAGE TO BRINDAVAN

TOWARDS the close of his life, the Master had one day said to the Holy Mother, "You visit all those places which it was not possible for this (meaning himself) to visit." Whatever be the significance of these words, it is a remarkable coincidence, that two weeks after the Master's demise, the Holy Mother started on a pilgrimage of upper India. It was an excellent plan to assuage her grief, and the time selected, too, was quite opportune in so far as the mood in which she then was, provided the best condition for reaping the maximum spiritual benefit from a visit to holy places.

She started from Calcutta on the 30th of August, 1886. She was accompanied by a party of devotees, consisting of Swamis Yogananda (Yogen), Abhedananda (Kali) and Adbhutananda (Latu), besides Lakshmi-Didi, Golap-Ma, and the wife of Master Mahashay (Mahendranath Gupta). As the party was proceeding to Brindavan, they halted on the way at Deoghar, Banaras and Ayodhya, all of which are well-known places of pilgrimage for the Hindus. It is said that at Banaras, while

the Holy Mother was witnessing the evening service of Viswanatha, she fell into an ecstatic mood. On the occasion of this visit, she also met the great Sannyasin and scholar of Banaras, Swami Bhaskarananda. Recounting her memories of him, she said in later days, "I also went to see Bhaskarananda at Banaras, on my way to Brindavan. I was then in a terrible state of mind. It was just after the Master's passing away. When I saw him, Bhaskarananda was totally naked. But that did not produce the least self-consciousness in his mind. The moment he saw me and other women he cried out, 'Don't be embarrassed, mothers. I see in you all the Mother of the Universe. Why should you feel shy?' Oh! what a great soul! Completely beyond all worldly ideas! In heat and cold alike, he always remained naked."

While proceeding towards Brindavan, she had a unique vision of the Master. During his last illness, he had given her his gold amulet (Ishta-Kavacha), which she used to worship and wear on her arm. She was sleeping in the train, with her arm having the amulet exposed, when the Master appeared to her in a vision and warned her of the danger of losing it. Describing the incident, she said, "While I was going to Brindavan, I saw the Master look at me through the window of the railway carriage and say, 'You have my gold amulet with you. See that you do not lose it.'" She got up at once, and put the amulet in the tin box in which she carried the

photograph of the Master. Subsequently she handed it over to the Belur Math.

After Ayodhya, her next halting place was Brindavan, the holiest spot on earth according to the Vaishnava cult. It is the place sanctified by the memories of a hundred exploits of Sri Krishna's boyhood days. It is again the one spot on earth where the heart of man, embodied as Sri Radha, loved the Divine with the reckless abandon of the most intense and unselfish form of love. The eternal sport of the Divine with the human soul, with its phases of love in separation and love in union, was enacted there on our earthly plane in the lifetime of Sri Krishna and the Gopis, and the pious Hindu mind believes that the same sport is going on in Brindavan for all time in a subtle invisible form.

Naturally, therefore, the sight of that place stirred the religious feelings of the Holy Mother to their depth. Besides, the association of it with the story of Radha's passionate grief at separation from her beloved Krishna, brought home to her the similarity of her own situation, and added poignancy to the sorrow that she was feeling in her heart for the loss of the Master. All her pent up feelings, having combined themselves into a passionate longing for the Divine, expressed as a torrential flow of tears that continued almost unremittingly during the early part of her stay at Brindavan. On meeting her beloved companion Yogin-Ma, who had proceeded there a few days before the Master's demise, she

cried out with excessive grief, "O Yogin dear!" and clasping her to her bosom, began to weep like a helpless child. This mood, in which love and grief blend in harmony, bringing about a gradual transformation of personality, continued for several days with her, until she had a wonderful vision in which the Master came to her and said, "Why are you weeping so much? Here I am. Where have I, after all, gone? Only from one room to another."

This experience assuaged her grief very much. She began to feel the nearness of the Master more and more. The anguish of separation gradually turned into a sense of utter peace and radiant joy. Often she would fall into exalted moods in which she would walk far over the sandy banks of the Jumna until her companions went after her and brought her back. Her temperament changed from an adult's into that of a little girl of seven or eight. How childlike in talk and behaviour she became, will be evident from an incident that Yogin-Ma records about this period of her life. One day she saw a dead body being carried to the cremation ground with the usual decoration of flowers and accompaniment of devotional music. Pointing out the procession to Yogin-Ma, she said, "Look! How fortunate is that man to meet with his death in this holy Brindavan! I also came here expecting the end of my life, but curiously enough, I did not get even a slight fever! And I am no longer young. (In fact, she was only thirty-three at the time.) See how

old I am—I have seen in my own life such elderly people as my own father and my husband's elder brother!" At this childish simplicity of hers, Yogin-Ma began to laugh and said, "What do you say, Mother? True, you have seen your father. But tell me, who doesn't do so!"

The Holy Mother's life at Brindavan was one of constant worship and meditation. As she said in later days, she and Yogin-Ma would sit together and repeat the name of God with such absorption that they knew not even when flies sat on their faces and made sores there. Brindavan is verily a town of temples, and in the course of her one year's stay, the Holy Mother visited most of them several times. In the temple of Radharamana she prayed to the Deity with tears in her eyes: "O Lord, remove from me the habit of finding fault with others. May I never find fault with anybody!" Her prayer seems to have been answered literally; for one of the distinguishing features of her character in later life was the complete absence of this tendency. And when she found too much of this habit in those about her, she would refer to this prayer of hers and add, "Formerly I also would see the defects of others. Then I prayed to the Master. Thus did I get rid of this habit. You may help a man in thousands of ways, but if you do him one wrong, he will at once turn his face away from you in anger. It is the nature of man only to see defects. One should learn to appreciate others' virtues . . .

Man is, no doubt, liable to err, but one must not notice it. By constantly finding fault with others one sees faults alone." To Yogin-Ma she said once, "Yogin, do not look at the faults of others lest your eyes should become impure."

Before she left Brindavan, she also did the circumambulation of the whole town and its suburbs connected with Sri Krishna's life—a pious act involving a walk of many miles, which she accomplished without any difficulty in spite of the rheumatism in her leg. In the course of her walk, Yogin-Ma and her companions noticed that she was observing the road and surroundings very carefully and that she was stopping all of a sudden at certain places. They understood that the memories of certain associations were driving her mind to states of spiritual absorption. But when questioned, she said nothing except asking them to go forward.

That the Holy Mother had, during those days, many spiritual experiences that wrought great transformations in her personality is certain, but she would not reveal anything about it to others. One day, however, her companions found her absorbed in Samadhi in her residence at Kala Babu's house. She remained in that state for a long time. Yogin-Ma tried to bring down her mind by repeating the name of the Lord in her ears, but it produced no effect. Afterwards Swami Yogananda came and tried the same process, which brought her mind to a state of semi-conscious experience of the world.

Then she said, as Sri Ramakrishna used to do on similar occasions, "I will eat something", whereupon some sweets, water and betel were placed before her. She partook a little of each as Sri Ramakrishna used to do. Even in taking the betel, she threw away its tip in the manner of the Master. Swami Yogananda put to her several questions in that mood, and received replies from her as if the Master himself were answering him. After she came down to the plane of physical consciousness, she told her companions that the consciousness of the Master was upon her during that state.

The stay in Brindavan is also noteworthy for the fact that it marked the beginning of her active spiritual ministry. For here for the first time she gave initiation to Swami Yogananda. How this happened is best described in her own words. "One day", she said, "the Master asked me in a vision to give initiation to Yogen (Swami Yogananda).[1] That frightened me a little. I also felt rather shy. I thought, 'What is this? What will people think of it? They will say, "Mother has started making disciples so soon!"' But on three consecutive nights I heard the Master telling me, 'I have not initiated Yogen. You do it.' He even told me what Mantra I was to give him. Before that time I had never

[1] On reliable authority it is learnt that the Master had in his own lifetime asked Swami Trigunatita to take initiation from the Holy Mother. But whether this actually took place, or whether it happened only after Swami Yogananda's initiation, no one can say definitely at present. See also foot-note on page 76.

spoken to Yogen. So the Master asked me to initiate him through 'daughter Yogin' (Yogin-Ma, her woman companion). I therefore spoke to her about it. She asked Yogen about his initiation and learned that the Master had not given him any Mantra. The Master had also appeared to Yogen and asked him to take initiation from me, but he did not dare to tell me about it. As both of us had received the Master's command, I initiated him."

The initiation took place in this way: One day the Holy Mother was worshipping in her room. A picture of the Master and a small box containing his relics were before her. She sent for Swami Yogananda and asked him to sit near her. While performing worship, she entered into Samadhi and in that state initiated him. She uttered the holy word so loudly that Yogin-Ma, who was in the next room, could hear it.

After staying in Brindavan for about a year, the party went to Hardwar, where the Holy Mother consigned a part of the Master's relics in the sacred waters of the Brahmakunda. Next they visited Jeypore and Pushkar and then returned to Calcutta. On their way they halted at Allahabad where the Holy Mother immersed the Master's hair at the holy confluence of the Jumna and Ganges. To describe the ceremony in her own poetic words, "I came to the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna. The water was very calm there. Holding the hair in my hand, I was thinking of consigning it

to the water, when suddenly a wave arose and carried away the hair from my hand. The sacred waters thus took the Master's hair from my hand as if to become holier by contact with it."

The party returned to Calcutta by August, 1887.

CHAPTER XII

LIFE AT KAMARPUKUR AND AFTER

THE year following the Holy Mother's return from Brindavan witnessed many adverse turns in her worldly circumstances, and formed perhaps the darkest period of her life, at least judged from the material point of view. About a week after her arrival in Calcutta she started for Kamarpukur via Burdwan accompanied by Golap-Ma and Swami Yogananda. On the way itself the life of privation that was in store for her at Kamarpukur began to cast its shadow on her. For want of money[1] she had to walk from Burdwan to Uchalan, a distance of sixteen miles. And after reaching Uchalan, while

[1] The special reason for the pecuniary difficulties of the Holy Mother at this time was the withdrawal of the allowance of rupees seven that she used to get from the temple management. This amount was what used to be given to Sri Ramakrishna according to the settlement made by Rani Rasmani, and after the Master's demise, Trailokya Nath, the then proprietor of the temple, continued to pay the amount to the Holy Mother for a time. But now owing to the conspiracy of Dinanath, the chief manager of the temple, and some of Holy Mother's own relatives who had become offended with her for petty reasons, the allowance was stopped, and she was left in her widowhood without any independent income, apart from the charity of others. Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda) pleaded vehemently with the authorities of the temple to continue the allowance, but his pleadings were unheeded.

she was partaking of a little of Khichuri that Golap-Ma had prepared for her, she remarked again and again, "Golap, your preparation tastes like nectar." So hungry and fatigued she was.

After escorting her to Kamarpukur, Swami Yogananda came away at the end of three days while Golap-Ma stayed with her for about a month. As soon as the Holy Mother reached the village, there was an uproar of criticism among the village women, who felt scandalized at the sight of a young widow wearing bracelets and a red-bordered cloth. So long as Golap-Ma was there, she shielded her from their uncharitable remarks, but after she left the place, the scandal-mongers got busy again. To her great relief Prasannamayi, the aged sister of the Lahas of Kamarpukur and an intimate friend of Sri Ramakrishna's boyhood days, now came to her rescue. She silenced the critics partly by declaring, "The wife of Gadai [1] is a veritable goddess. She is not an ordinary type of woman."

The Holy Mother herself now decided to disarm all criticism by removing the bracelets from her wrists, but she was prevented from doing so by a vision she had of the Master. To describe it in her own words, "While staying at Kamarpukur after my return from Brindavan, I took off my bracelets for fear of public criticism. In fact, people were already talking about it. I also wished to go for

[1] The pet name (the shortened form of 'Gadadhar') by which Sri Ramakrishna was known in his boyhood.

bath in the Ganges, for which I have always had a special devotion. But the river is far away from Kamarpukur. Now one day I saw, to my great surprise, that the Master was coming towards the house from the direction of Bhuti's canal. He was followed by Naren, Baburam, Rakhal and many other devotees. Further I saw that from his feet sprang a stream of water which flowed in front of him in waves. I said to myself, 'I see he is everything. The Ganges has sprung from his lotus feet.' Quickly I plucked flowers from the side of the Raghuvir temple and offered handfuls of them into the stream. The Master then said to me, 'Don't take off the bracelets. Do you know the Vaishnava Tantras?' I said, 'What are they? I do not know anything about them.' Thereupon he said, 'Gaurimani (the same as Gauri-Ma) will come here this afternoon. She will tell you about them.' That very afternoon Gaurdasi arrived, and I learned from her that to a woman her husband is Chinmaya (Pure Spirit)."

A still greater difficulty which the Holy Mother faced at this time was the utter poverty and loneliness in which she was, as it were, condemned to live. Towards the end of his life, Sri Ramakrishna had said to her, "After my time you go to Kamarpukur, live upon whatever you get—be it mere boiled rice and greens—and spend your time in repeating the name of Hari." These words came to be fulfilled to the very letter during this period of

the Holy Mother's life. She had no cash in hand. She had to take a spade and dig the earth in order to cultivate some greens to go with her daily food. Until these were fit for use, she made rice out of the paddy in the granary, offered it to the Master, and partook of it herself without any condiments. She did not have even a few pice for purchasing salt, an article which is not ordinarily denied even to the poorest of the poor.

Being ever resigned to the divine will, she never spoke of her wretched condition to anyone, not even to her own mother. On hearing of her return to Kamarpukur, Syamasundari Devi had asked her to come to Jayrambati. So she went there one day to meet her mother. Syamasundari Devi wept to see her dressed almost like a beggar woman. She asked her repeatedly to stay with her at Jayrambati, but the Holy Mother would not agree to it, nor disclose the miserable condition of her life. She only said, "I am now going back to Kamarpukur. Let things shape themselves as He wills."

That the story of her sufferings remained hidden from the outside world, was as much due to the utter loneliness of her life at Kamarpukur as due to her own silence regarding it. For there was no one else in the house either to keep her company or to share her woes. Ramlal, Sivaram and Lakshmi Devi, the children of Rameswar (Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother) were the other members of her family. Of these, Ramlal, who occupied the post of the chief

priest of Kali at Dakshineswar, was the eldest, and it was his duty, according to the Hindu family system, to have taken care of the Holy Mother in her widowhood. But he was hostile to her and was chiefly responsible for the conspiracy that stopped the small pension she used to be given from the Kali temple. Sivaram, though affectionate, was of no practical use. Both of them stayed at Dakshineswar, and Lakshmi Devi, their sister, who often used to keep company with the Holy Mother in her Dakshineswar days, now preferred to live with her brothers at Calcutta. Thus the Holy Mother was practically left alone in a hut at Kamarpukur. Whenever her solitariness was broken by occasional visits of Ramlal and others, it was only to be pestered with family quarrels over property, and with unpleasant talks of relatives who looked upon her as a burden. During one of these visits, Ramlal abruptly left for Calcutta with the others, after making some arrangements for the worship of the family deity Raghuvir and effecting a family partition according to which the Master's small cottage was assigned to the Holy Mother as her share. The Holy Mother was thus left alone in utter poverty without even any relative to help or guide her.

Poverty and loneliness at times drove her mind to brood anxiously over her future, and it was only the vivid consciousness of the Master's guidance and protection that helped her to stand the ordeal. " While staying alone at Kamarpukur,"

she said in later days, "I thought within myself, 'I have no child. There is no one in this world whom I can call my *own*. What will happen to me?' Then the Master appeared to me and said, 'Well, you want a son. I have given you so many jewels of sons. And in course of time you will hear many many more people addressing you as Mother.'" Experiences of this type, giving her a sense of the palpable reality of the Master and of the work which he intended to do through her, alone sustained her in these hours of trial.

This state of affairs did not, however, continue very long. For, in spite of the Holy Mother's silence about her sufferings, the news leaked out through other sources and reached the ears of the Master's disciples. Sometimes, at the request of the Holy Mother, Prasannamayi of the Laha family used to send an old maidservant to stay with her at nights in that lonely house. This woman carried the news regarding her life to the outside world. It soon reached the ears of Syamasundari Devi, who was very much aggrieved at her daughter's misfortune. She passed the information to her son, Prasanna Kumar, who was earning his livelihood in Calcutta as a priest. He in turn went to Ramlal, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew and the head of the family at the time, and remonstrated with him over the neglect of his sister. He also met Golap-Ma and told her how the Holy Mother was taking food even without salt while they, the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, were

still alive. Golap-Ma at once took the matter up seriously, carried on a vigorous propaganda among the disciples of the Master—both lay and monastic, men as well as women—raised subscriptions from among them, and in the name of the followers of Sri Ramakrishna sent an earnest letter of invitation to the Holy Mother, requesting her to come over to Calcutta.

The Holy Mother was now in a fix. She was after all a widow of only thirty-four or so, and what would people think of her if she went to Calcutta at the invitation of people who were not her relations? Just to know the reaction of public opinion in the village, she made the fact of invitation from Calcutta known to her co-villagers. Of course, the village conservatives all shook their heads over it, but Prasannamayi again came to her rescue. She said, "What do these villagers know of the wife of Gadai? Gadai's disciples are her children. It will be quite right for her to accept their invitation." Encouraged by this venerable lady's opinion, she went to ascertain the view of her own mother at Jayrambati. Syama-sundari Devi was not at first decisive, but after feeling the pulse of the village, gladly agreed to her daughter's departure to Calcutta.

So after a stay of about nine months at Kamar-pukur, the Holy Mother was once again in Calcutta in April 1888 to the infinite joy of the devotees, especially of the women disciples of Sri Rama-krishna, who were feeling the need for the fostering

care of some one to help the growth of their devotional life.

The disciples of the Master now began to feel that the responsibility of looking after the Holy Mother's comforts thereafter rested on them. It must, however, be pointed out that among the householder devotees of the Master, there were some who did not think very highly of the Holy Mother at first and held that women devotees were making too much of her because she was of their own sex. One of them is actually said to have remarked, "I know Sri Ramakrishna, but I know nothing of his wife." But hearing from Swami Yogananda, Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma about the high spiritual moods they witnessed in her at Brindavan and other places, most of them changed their view. They now did their best to keep her in comfort, but the main responsibility of looking after her fell on Swami Yogananda and Golap-Ma until finally Swami Saradananda, by his single-handed exertion, made permanent arrangement for her comfortable stay and maintenance.

The Holy Mother's life from now (1888) till her final exit from the world in 1920 centres round the series of journeys she periodically undertook from Calcutta to her native village of Jayrambati and back, and her time, it would appear, was almost equally divided between these two places. Until 1909, when the Udbodhan Office at Baghbazar, Calcutta, was constructed by Swami Saradananda for her residence, she used to be accommodated in rented houses

whenever her stay in Calcutta was long, and in the houses of devotees like Balaram Babu and Master Mahashay when it was of short duration. It was during this period, probably in 1893, when she was staying in Nilambar Mukherji's garden, that she performed the austerity known as the Panchatapa.[1]

This period of her life was also the time of her active spiritual ministry. No doubt it had in a sense begun with the initiation of Swami Yogananda in Brindavan, but it grew into the most important function of her life only after her return from Kamarpukur.

Indeed, her own spiritual genius had by this time reached its fullest manifestation, thus fitting her to continue the Master's work of awakening the spiritual

[1] Panchatapa means 'austerity of the five fires'. The aspirant lights four fires on four sides, and with the sun burning overhead, he practises prayer and meditation.

The Holy Mother seems to have performed this in order to get rid of some kind of psychic disturbance. During her days at Kamarpukur she used to see the figure of a girl of eleven or twelve years moving about her constantly. Sometimes the figure was of a Sannyasin with a beard, who insisted that she should perform Panchatapa. Whatever the exact nature of the vision, she consulted Yogin-Ma about it and both of them together decided to perform Panchatapa. About her practice of this austerity, the Holy Mother said, "Fires were made on four sides with cow-dung cakes, and there was the intense heat of the sun above. After finishing bath in the morning I came near the fire and saw it burning brightly. I was seized with much fear. I wondered how I could enter the place and sit there until sunset. Then as I sat there repeating the name of the Master, I found that the fire had no heat. I practised it for seven days. It made my complexion dark like ash. After that I did not again see that figure of the little girl or of the Sannyasin."

consciousness of others. On her return from Kamarpukur, her intimate companions like Yogin-Ma noticed that she had become remarkably indrawn, and that a rare loveliness that was not of this earth was radiating from her face. They had occasion to witness even more tangible signs of her spiritual power during her stay at Calcutta in 1888. Yogin-Ma records that she found her in the state of Samadhi while meditating on the roof of Balaram Babu's house. Describing her experience in that state, the Holy Mother said to Yogin-Ma, "I found in that state that I had travelled into a distant country. Everybody there was very affectionate to me. My beauty was beyond description. Sri Ramakrishna also was there. With great tenderness they made me sit by his side. I cannot describe to you the nature of that ecstatic joy. When my mind came down from that exalted mood, I found my body lying there. I thought, 'How could I possibly enter into this ugly body?' I could not at all persuade my mind to do so. After a long while, it did, and the body became conscious again."

Another day she was meditating in the house of Nilambar Mukherji along with Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma. After finishing her meditation, Yogin-Ma looked at the Mother and found her seated motionless as before, absorbed in deep meditation. It took a long time for her mind to come down to physical consciousness, and when it actually regained traces of it, she began to say, "O Yogin, where are

my hands? Where are my feet?" Yogin-Ma pressed her limbs and said to her, "Why, Mother, here are your hands and here your feet." Still it took her considerable time to become conscious of her whole body.

These experiences of hers show how her mind could at will transcend the body-consciousness. The second experience described above is interpreted by many as the Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

She had also another unique vision about this time. She saw Sri Ramakrishna getting down into the Ganges and his whole body dissolving into the sacred waters of that river. Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) was taking that water and sprinkling it on innumerable people with the cry, "Glory unto Ramakrishna!" The vision created so vivid an impression on her mind that for long she felt hesitation in stepping into the Ganges with which the Master's body had become one. It also helped to fill her mind with a sense of purpose in life, which she seemed to have lost after the Master's demise. She now felt convinced that physical death did not mean discontinuity of life for the Master. He lived in his mission and he worked through those whom he made his instruments in its fulfilment. As one of the principal persons whom he had commissioned with the responsibilities of the future, she felt her life was meant to serve a great purpose.

This vision of hers synchronized more or less with the inauguration of the great preaching activities of

Swami Vivekananda, and was symbolic of the wide dissemination in future of the spiritual power that the Master had brought into this world. It may also be noted in passing that with this impetus given by Swami Vivekananda to the spread of the Master's message, her own part in the propagation of it became increasingly patent; for large numbers of people began to flock to her for initiation and advice, and she became the centre of attraction for spiritual aspirants hailing from different parts of the world. But before taking up the subject of her spiritual ministry, it is necessary to consider another phase of her life that runs parallel to it, namely, her dealings with the members of her family.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE SETTING OF DOMESTIC LIFE

IN the latter part of her life, whenever the Holy Mother left Calcutta for the village, she spent her time mostly in her parental home at Jayrambati, and not at Kamarpukur. Indeed, since her return from the latter place after about nine months' stay, her visits to it were few and far between. No doubt, throughout her life she held Kamarpukur in great esteem as being the Master's birth-place, and she was very enthusiastic over the idea of building a temple there in his memory. She also considered herself to be a native of that village always. For example, when, in the course of the performance of religious rites at Banaras, the priests asked the name of her village, she gave it as Kamarpukur. The Master had once said to her, "One may beg food from others, but still one must not live at another's house. Don't pull down your humble cottage at Kamarpukur, however great might be the respect with which the devotees receive you in their homes." And true to the Master's advice, all through her life she bore the expenses of

4. The Holy Mother At Forty-Five

repairing and maintaining the cottage at Kamarpukur that had come down to her through him.

In spite of all this, Kamarpukur ceased to be her main rural home. Between April 1888, the date of her return to Calcutta at the invitation of devotees, and 1897, she is known to have visited Kamarpukur ten times,[1] and from this last date onwards she does not seem to have visited it at all. There were probably several reasons for her shifting from Kamarpukur. To some enquiries of later days, she said that Kamarpukur being too closely associated with the Master, it pained her to stay there in his absence. To a young devotee who attended on her, she said: " After the Master's passing away I moved about here and there for some time. Then I went to live at Kamarpukur. But my relatives (meaning the nephews Ramlal and others) seemed to be indifferent towards me. The people of the village too were a high-handed lot. So my mother took me to Jayrambati and did not allow me to live at Kamarpukur any more."

While loneliness and indifference of relatives formed the immediate cause of her gravitating towards Jayrambati, there was another reason for her permanent shifting to that place after 1897, till her demise in 1920. That was the domestic situation

[1] The Holy Mother visited Kamarpukur subsequently on the following occasions: End of October, 1890; in February and in July to October, 1891; in July 1892; in January and in July, 1893; in May, 1895; in November, 1895 to January, 1896; in May and in September-October of 1897.

in her parental home and her intimate connection with the loves and fortunes of the members of that family. We have already seen that the Holy Mother's parental family consisted of her mother Syamasundari Devi and her four younger brothers—Prasanna Kumar, Barada Prasad, Kali Kumar and Abhay Charan. Being the eldest of Syamasundari's children, the Holy Mother had to do much with the nursing and upbringing of these brothers of hers, and therefore there was naturally a strong tie of affection uniting her with them. None of these brothers had any of the great spiritual qualities that distinguished the Holy Mother, but were just men of the world, and some of them probably represented an extreme type of them. Moreover none of them prospered in life.

The good sister that she was, the Holy Mother was interested in the welfare of these brothers, and they, too, realizing the warm feeling that she had towards them, always leaned upon her even after they were grown up men. And, as it frequently happens when people are not sufficiently well off in life, they tried their best to realize their sister's love in terms of rupees, annas and pies, especially in her later days when her devoted disciples began to send her money to make her comfortable. There was, therefore, a regular rivalry among her brothers and their families in the matter of extracting the best they could from her, even to the extent of causing her worry and annoyance. But with that

remarkable patience for which she was noted, she bore it all without a murmur, and did whatever she could for their worldly welfare. Moreover, whenever she was in Jayrambati, she practically looked into the whole internal management of their household. She would not allow her aged mother to do any work, and the wives of her brothers were at first too young to take up any serious responsibility. Thus she boiled and husked their paddy, cooked food for them, and sometimes even looked after their children. In fact she exerted herself so much for their welfare that Girish Ghosh once remarked that these brothers of the Holy Mother must have performed tremendous austerities in their previous birth to have merited so much attention from their divine sister.

After the death of Syamasundari Devi in 1906, the Holy Mother became practically the mistress of the family. But she found that with the growth of their families, the brothers were developing their own separate interests to the neglect of the common family, and that this was leading to endless bickerings and quarrels among them. Finally, as the only way to restore peace, she asked Swami Saradananda to come over to her village and arrange for the partition of their ancestral properties. It was on 23rd March, 1909 that the Swami arrived at Jayrambati on this work. To arbitrate at a partition is never a pleasant duty for any one, much less for a highly spiritual personage like the Swami. But he

considered it both a privilege and a blessing to be of service to the Holy Mother and to carry out any of her commands. Possessed as he was of great powers of mental detachment, he spent much of his time in talking about the Master and in editing Swami Vivekananda's Jnana Yoga, while attending simultaneously to the demarking of landed properties and mediating in the bitter quarrels that arose in the course of partition among the 'uncles', as the Holy Mother's brothers were called by the devotees. For example, all the documents were in the custody of 'uncle' Kali. 'Uncle' Prasanna, however, thought that he had an equal right to be their custodian, and in the course of a sitting of the parties concerned in the partition, tried to snatch them away from his brother's hands. This resulted in a scuffle between them, and Swami Saradananda had to come between them before they would separate and resume their seats. Under the able arbitration of the Swami, the bickerings of the parties were finally silenced and the partition of all the properties, including houses and lands, was effected. The Holy Mother was at that time asked where she would like to stay at Jayrambati after the partition. Her reply was: "The Master used to say, 'Rats make holes and thus provide places for snakes to live in.' I shall stay a few days with Prasanna, a few days with Kali and so on." In fact, until a new cottage with a thatched roof and mud walls was built for her in 1915, she used to stay mostly with

Prasanna Kumar, the eldest of the brothers. She did so because this brother had by his first wife two young daughters, Nalini and Maku, and his second wife was too young to bring them up. The Holy Mother took up the responsibility of these two young girls, and in later days one found them always in the group of relatives who formed her train when she moved from one place to another.

Partition, however, did not stop the rivalries among the brothers. For the Holy Mother was to them a common property still, and they indulged in mutual recrimination over real or supposed attempts that one or the other was making to derive pecuniary advantages from her. The way in which they worried her and her reactions to their conduct will be best illustrated by a few incidents recorded by her disciples.

On one occasion the Holy Mother arrived at Jayrambati with some disciples. One of them said to her, "Mother, did you notice how your brothers behaved towards you? They did not even send a man to receive you when you returned to the village." The Mother thereupon said to one of her brothers, "Why did you not send a man to help me cross the river? My children (referring to the disciples) accompanied me. You did not go yourself, nor did you send a man." The brother replied, "Sister, I did not do so for fear of Kali (the next brother). He might complain that I was trying to win you over to my side. Do I not know what a

priceless treasure you are? But I am helpless. Please bless me that I may have you as my sister in my future births. I do not want anything else." To this the Mother replied, "Do you think that I shall be born again in your family? I have had enough of it this time. To be your sister again! My father was a great devotee of Rama, and my mother was compassion incarnate. Therefore I was born in this family."

Once, disgusted with the brothers' endless demands for money, the Holy Mother remarked, "They always ask only for money. Did they ever ask, even unknowingly, for devotion and knowledge?"

One day at about 10 a.m. she was seated at the edge of the outer verandah of her house. Suddenly her two brothers, Kali and Barada, began to quarrel about a hedge put up by the former and were soon about to come to blows. The Holy Mother, unable to witness the quarrel any longer, went herself to pacify them. She was much agitated. Now she would blame one, and now she would restrain the other. After a while a disciple of hers and some others intervened, and the brothers entered their respective homes, still abusing each other. The Mother also went into her house. She was still in an agitated mood, but as soon as she took her seat, she burst into laughter and said, "What an illusion Mahamaya has created! Here is this infinite world, and what one calls one's own possession will be left behind at death. It is a wonder that men

cannot see this simple truth." So saying she laughed again, the laughter continuing for some time.

Among the brothers of the Holy Mother the most brilliant one, in fact the hope of the family, was Abhay Charan, but in the end it so happened that owing to him she came to be burdened with responsibilities of a very taxing and onerous nature. We have already seen that Abhay Charan qualified himself as a medical practitioner. Unfortunately, soon after his obtaining the degree he died of cholera in 1899, leaving behind his widow, Surabala, who was expecting to be a mother. On his death-bed he said to the Holy Mother, "Hereafter you look after them" (meaning his wife and the child that was to be born). Abhay was the youngest and most beloved of the Holy Mother's brothers. His unexpected death left her very sad, but the fate of his wife gradually began to cause her greater anxiety. For, the terrible calamity that befell her unhinged the mind of poor Surabala. In February, 1900, while she was still in that state of mind, she gave birth to a daughter who was given the name of Radharani and came to be more familiarly called as Radhu or Radhi. The loss of her husband, the strain of motherhood, and to add to these, fright caused by an attempted burglary in their house about this time, all together made poor Surabala utterly insane. The question of bringing up the new-born babe became a serious problem for the family. Remembering the words of her dying brother and seeing

also the utterly helpless condition of his wife and baby, the Holy Mother felt the new responsibility as her own. She made arrangements for a nurse to assist the insane lady in rearing up the baby and came back to Calcutta, but she could get no peace of mind thinking of the possible harm that might befall Radhu from the neglect and eccentricity of her mother. "One evening", she said, "I was worshipping in the shrine, when suddenly a veil was lifted before my vision like a curtain on the stage. I saw that in our country home Radhu was being subjected to great suffering. She was being given a few grains of puffed rice for her food. She was eating them as she rolled in the dust in the open courtyard. Radhu's mother tied her arm with threads of red, blue and other colours, just like a lunatic. I saw that other children in the family were well taken care of. At this condition of Radhu, I felt choked like a person whose head is pressed under water. I clearly felt that such would be her fate if I should not take care of her."

This, as the Holy Mother said later on, was the moment when Mahamaya, the great world-illusionist, seized her in her clutches; for from that time onwards Radhu became for her a source of passionate attachment, a veritable obsession in life, until towards her last days she cut this bond of affection by the power of her own discriminative faculty.

After the vision of Radhu's misery, the Holy Mother went to Jayrambati at once and took direct charge of her. Since then she never allowed Radhu to be parted from her. As her disciples noticed, she could not relish food without Radhu, and she felt her sleep disturbed unless Radhu was by her side. So strong was the bond of affection with which she came to be tied to this girl all of a sudden. In fact, she assumed the role of her mother, and Radhu, too, came to look upon her as such, her own mother being addressed by her as Neri-Ma.

In course of time Radhu and her mother became the greatest source of trouble and worry to the Holy Mother. The amount of trouble and anxiety to which both these subjected her [1] would have driven even the fondest of earthly mothers to desperation and indifference. Surabala, Radhu's mother, was in the first place jealous of the Holy Mother; for she found her only daughter loving the Holy Mother more than herself. Her insane imagination, therefore, discovered various evil motives in the Holy Mother's love of Radhu, and with these in mind, she would abuse her in season and out of season before others. Whenever the Holy Mother put Radhu under medical treatment for her frequently recurring ailments, Surabala charged her with attempting to kill her daughter with drugs. Once, in an outburst of temper, she attacked the

[1] In the 'Conversations' forming the second part of this book, plenty of instances of this will be found.

Holy Mother with a thick fire-brand from the oven, and only the timely intervention of some disciples saved her from serious injury. On another occasion Surabala fancied that her son-in-law had been drowned and created a row in the family. Once she went with Radhu's ornaments to a greedy relative, who, taking advantage of her helpless condition, deprived her of all the valuables, so that the Holy Mother had to intercede, and with great difficulty restore them to her. When the persecutions of this mad woman became unbearable, the Holy Mother would remark, "Perhaps I worshipped Siva with Vilva leaves having thorns. Therefore I have got this thorn in life."

Only on one point there was method in Surabala's madness and that was in respect of her belief that all money or other property that came to the Holy Mother would ultimately go to Radhu. So, it is said, when the Udbodhan Office was built as the Mother's Calcutta residence, she was very much delighted. Nothing pained her and upset her so much as seeing the Holy Mother make presents to others. Thus once at Banaras she severely reproached her for her liberality, whereupon the Holy Mother said to her, "My nature is that of a child. Can I calculate so much? I give to him who seeks."

If Radhu's mother was a thorn on the Holy Mother's side, her daughter was no less so. As she grew up, she proved herself to be weak in both body and mind. Physically she was always ailing,

and mentally she was a moron. Indeed, there was a simplicity about her then as well as in her more mature years, but that was no compensation for her utter lack of understanding and discrimination. Obstinate, petulant, eccentric and intractable, she could not in the least be rectified by all the love and attention that the Holy Mother bestowed on her. Realizing this, the Holy Mother remarked sorrowfully one day, "See how much I am entangled with Radhu! How well has Gaurdasi trained her girl, and I have created a monkey!" Radhu did, indeed, love the Holy Mother very much, but for one of her temperament and level of understanding, love only meant sanction for taking extreme liberties in one's dealings with the object of love. Thus she disobeyed the Holy Mother, flouted her before others, got irritated with her for no reason whatever, abused and cursed her unsparingly, threw objects at her recklessly, and spoke and did things that would exhaust the patience of any other human being.

In June, 1911, the Holy Mother arranged for Radhu's marriage. But even long after the marriage Radhu would not go to her husband's house. So both she and her husband would stay mostly in the Mother's household. Even though she was now quite grown up, she continued to be of the same nature as before, and her behaviour towards the Holy Mother in no way improved. In fact, a few years later, when she was an expectant mother, she

was almost on the verge of insanity. Her insolence and intractability were now at their zenith, and her general health too was in a very precarious condition. It was a very anxious time for the Holy Mother. She adopted every measure, both medical and occult, for the safety of Radhu before and after delivery. She came out safe through the ordeal, but that did not in any way improve matters. For she continued to be ailing in both body and mind, and the Holy Mother had, with the utmost difficulty, to find enough money for her care and treatment. Her own health was fast declining and she was approaching her end, but yet it was now that she was called upon to face what was perhaps the most anxious and worrying situation in her life. The following pages from a disciple's diary will amply illustrate it and show her reactions to the same :

" Radhu's baby was now six months old, but still Radhu could not stand up because of weakness. She could only crawl about. Further, she became addicted to taking opium. The Holy Mother too was of late not keeping well, and was having occasional attacks of fever. She had been trying to wean Radhu from her opium habit. But Radhu was very insistent. That morning the Holy Mother was dressing vegetables, when Radhu came for opium. The Holy Mother understood it and said to her, 'Radhi, you have had enough of this. Why don't you stand up? It is impossible for me to take care

of you any longer. For your sake I have lost my devotion and everything. Can you tell me how I can possibly meet all your expenses?' At these words Radhu became very angry. She took from the vegetable basket a big egg-plant and threw it with great force at the Holy Mother. It struck her with a thud and she curved her back in pain. Immediately a swelling appeared on that spot. She looked at the photograph of the Master with folded hands and said, 'Lord, please forgive her misdemeanour; for she is senseless.' Then she took the dust of her own feet, put it on the head of Radhu and said, 'Radhi, the Master did not even once utter a word of remonstrance towards this body, and you afflict it so much. How can you understand where my place is? You think nothing of me, because I live with you all.' At these words Radhu burst into tears.

"A few days before, a devotee from Bangalore had spent some days with the Holy Mother at Koalpara. He gave her a good sum of money for Radhu's expenses, and while leaving Koalpara said to her, 'Mother, whenever you need money for your expenses, please inform me without the slightest hesitation.' At Jayrambati her expenses increased a great deal. Swami Saradananda had written to her that, as he had to procure money from here and there, he found it difficult to send her monthly expenses regularly. At this the Holy Mother said to the disciple, 'I think Sarat has not

much money to spare. Otherwise he won't write like that. The other day, the devotee from Bangalore promised to send money. But how can I write to him for it? Shall I not be able to fulfil the last injunction of the Master? Look here, Radhi, I am going to lose everything for your sake! The Master said to me, "Well, don't stretch out your hand to anybody even for a pice. You shall never lack simple food and clothing. If you beg a person even for a pice, remember, you will be selling your head to him."'"

Radhu and her mother always formed an inseparable part of the Holy Mother's retinue, whether she was in Calcutta or Jayrambati. Besides, there were also the daughters of Prasanna Kumar—Nalini and Maku,—of whom the former was unhappily married and the latter had a husband who was too poor to maintain her. They, too, therefore depended on the Holy Mother and mostly stayed with her. These girls, together with some of the young sons of her brothers, who always preferred their kind aunt to their own mothers, also formed a part of her household and often moved with her from Jayrambati to Calcutta and back. And, of course, when she was in the village, there were also her brothers, who, though loving, were always bent upon extracting whatever they could from her. It was in such a domestic context that the Holy Mother found herself in the latter part of her life. The 'Conversations', which form the second part of this book,

give a realistic picture of her calm, innocent and dignified personality as it appeared against this distracting background, and show also how, placed in such a situation, she none the less proved a source of spiritual inspiration to hundreds of people who looked to her for guidance and counsel.

It may not be out of place now to consider certain possible questions that may arise in the reader's mind with reference to the Holy Mother's domestic life described above. According to Indian traditions of ascetic life, a spiritual personage, whether man or woman, is supposed to snap the bond of that special love and affection that one ordinarily has for one's kith and kin. This being so, what justification can be offered for the Holy Mother having maintained her family connections till the end? Even if that is in any sense justifiable, how is one to reconcile her spiritual greatness with the intense attachment that she evinced in her love of Radhu? For a spiritual person is supposed to have no attachment to anything in this world. Questions of this kind are sure to arise in one's mind when one studies the domestic relations of the Holy Mother. It is therefore necessary to examine them in detail and find out their true significance.

In the first place, the Indian tradition that requires one to snap one's connection with one's family and circle of relatives is applicable only in the case of Sannyasins (monks)—men who take to the fourth order of life with the usual Vedic rituals.

Now the Holy Mother did not belong to the monastic order, although her life was an object-lesson in the essential principles of monastic life, namely, purity and renunciation. Her spiritual life was a natural growth, without the least influence of any kind of institutionalism. Like any other woman, she grew up in her parental home amidst many relatives, came later to associate with her husband's family, discharged her duties to all without any consideration of self, and by virtue of her own endowments and contact with her divine husband, advanced spiritually in the midst of her domestic environment. In other words, there was in her case no break between domestic life and spiritual life, and thus she felt no conflict between the ethics of the house and that of spiritual life. As a member of the family all through life, she did but perform one of her prime duties when she tried to be of some help to her poor relatives.

But even in the discharge of her domestic functions, her conduct had a remarkable feature that elevates even her worldly activity to the borderland of the highest ideal of spiritual ethics. There is no worldly love without some expectation of return. Only, in the mother's love for the offspring, perhaps, there is a large element of pure disinterestedness. But even here considerations of deriving benefits from children in future often play an important part. Thus, to love a person when that person can offer nothing in return, is itself

extremely rare in this world; it is much more so when the object of love gives only kicks and abuses in return for the endless troubles and worries. A given example of love may look apparently worldly from an examination of its setting, but if in point of disinterestedness and self-abnegation it fulfils the condition mentioned last, then one cannot help admiring it as a very high achievement of the human spirit, however alien it may be to the code of morality followed by a mere ascetic. For a new quality, utterly absent in worldly love, has emerged in it, and by virtue of that quality it brings out all that is greatest and noblest in human nature.

The love of the Holy Mother for her relatives, it must be admitted, was of this order, even if one considers it to be of the worldly species because of its domestic associations. She had no direct responsibility for any of these relatives. Out of sheer goodness or a sense of pity she wanted to be of some service to them. Nor was there the least trace of any selfish consideration in her love. There was nothing she could expect from her brothers either in this life or in the next; much less from the eccentric Radhu or her insane mother. Extreme worry and torment were her only reward for all her solicitude. But even in the midst of it all, she went on with the discharge of her self-imposed responsibilities—calm, forgiving, sweet, loving, dignified and never forgetting the true principles of spiritual life. Her example in this respect sets before us the highest

ideal of maternal love, which forms the basic virtue of domestic ethics and the one force that assures the stability of home life. For, in all other phases of love too, these elements of utter forgiveness and unselfish service, so characteristic of maternal love, are present in however small a degree, and it is by virtue of this alone that they become helpful in the domestication and, ultimately, in the spiritualization of the animal man. Therefore the home life of the Holy Mother, wherein we get a remarkable manifestation of unadulterated maternal love, becomes an integral part of her mission, and adds to the significance of her life to the vast majority of mankind. As she was immaculately pure and unselfish in the midst of all these worldly concerns, her domestic situation, which appears as a blemish to the ascetic code of ethics, only goes to enhance the spiritual worth and the ethical significance of her life.

The Holy Mother's intense attachment to Radhu requires also to be considered separately from her relation to the rest of her family; for, besides the ethical significance we have referred to above, it had also a spiritual purpose to serve in the fulfilment of her life's mission. We have already seen how, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother's mind used to dwell at a high spiritual level. The only purpose of life in the world which her pure and desireless mind had recognized till then was the service of the Master, and after he terminated

his earthly existence, she found nothing in this world to live for. Now, a mind without desires of any kind cannot for long function through the body. Just like gold, which requires to be mixed with a certain percentage of baser metal before it can be made into ornaments, the mind too must have a modicum of worldly desires if it is to work on the physical plane. Otherwise it would be absorbed perpetually in Samadhi, and the body, in the absence of its proper upkeep, would soon disintegrate. Therefore in the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find that with the definite purpose of keeping the mind on the physical plane, he used to create by an effort of the will such harmless desires as love of association with pure souls or longing to partake of some particular sweetmeat. Now in the case of the Holy Mother, too, in the absence of any worldly tie after the Master's passing away, there was a strong inclination to give up the body and seek perpetual union with the Divine. As Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma, her companions, noticed, the phenomenon of Samadhi became more and more frequent with her, and if she were left without any worldly distraction, there was every possibility of her giving up the body early in life. But she had a particular mission to fulfil in continuation of the Master's life-work, and her body had, therefore, to be preserved until the time for her work was ripe. The appearance of Radhu on the horizon of her life provided her with that element of worldly attachment necessary for the continuance of the body. In

other words, love of Radhu was the mental ballast which held her consciousness at the physical level and thus helped her to minister to the spiritual needs of countless men and women.

This is not a mere fancy of her devotees, nor a theory improvised as an explanation of some unpleasant facts. It was the conviction she herself had arrived at on the strength of some very striking visions, partly premonitory in character. To quote her own words on the point: "How the Master has entangled me through Radhu! . . . After the passing away of the Master, I did not at all relish anything in life. I became utterly indifferent to worldly things and kept on praying, 'What shall I achieve by remaining in this world?' At that time I saw a girl ten or twelve years old, walking in front of me dressed in a red cloth. The Master pointed her out to me and said, 'Cling to her as a support. Many children (disciples) will come to you.' The next moment he disappeared. I did not see the girl any more. Later on I was seated in this very place (her house at Jayrambati). At that time Radhu's mother was stark mad. She was dragging some rags pressed under her arm, and Radhu crawled behind her weeping. Seeing this, I felt a peculiar sensation in my heart. At once I ran to Radhu and took her in my arms. I said to myself, 'Well, if I do not look after this child, who else will take care of her? She has no father, and her mother is that insane woman.' No sooner had I taken the child in my

arms, than I saw the Master. He said, 'This is that girl. Cling to her as your support. She is Yogamaya, the illusive power.'"

Indeed, even when the Holy Mother was alive, some of her intimate followers felt the contradiction between her deep attachment to Radhu and her position in life as a spiritual teacher. A disciple who felt this doubt in his mind, once asked her plainly, "Mother, why are you so much attached? Day and night you dote on Radhu like one entangled in worldliness." The disciple had put the same question to her before, and she had replied with her characteristic humility, "You see, we are women; it is our nature to love our children." But on this occasion she became excited and said, "Where will you find another like me? Try to find one. You see, those who meditate intensely on the highest Reality become very subtle and pure in mind. Whatever they think with that mind, they think very intensely.[1] Therefore it appears to others like attachment. When lightning flashes, it is reflected in glass panes alone, not in wooden shutters."

Once Yogin-Ma also felt a similar doubt about the Holy Mother. She thought, "The Master was

[1] This was true of Sri Ramakrishna also. Whenever he thought of doing a thing, he would be restless until he accomplished it. In his love of young disciples like Swami Vivekananda, there was an intensity unknown in worldly love. When he was separated from them for long, he felt that his heart was being squeezed like a wet towel.

a man of such renunciation, and we see the Holy Mother behaving like a perfectly worldly person. Day and night she is restless about her brothers, nephews and nieces. I don't understand it." Shortly after this doubt had arisen in her mind, she was one day meditating on the banks of the Ganges, when she saw in a vision the Master standing before her and saying, "Look there! Don't you see something floating on the Ganges?" She saw a new-born baby, entangled in its entrails, being carried along by the current. The Master then said to her, "Can anything ever make the Ganges impure? Can anything defile its waters?[1] Regard her (the Holy Mother) too in the same way. Never have any doubt about her. Know that she and this (referring to himself) are identical."

On these explanations of the Holy Mother's attachments, a critical mind may remark that, however good they may be in themselves, they are too subjective, and that, being of the nature of rationalization, they will be convincing only to her followers. The question will, therefore, be raised

[1] According to Hindu belief the Ganges is holy under all conditions, however dirty and polluted it may appear from outside. There is also a chemical property inherent in the water of the Ganges, corresponding to this religious belief about it. One can keep its water even from the Hoogly near Calcutta, where it is most polluted, for any number of years; it will never get spoiled like ordinary water. Pilgrims who carry Ganges water to their homes keep it for years. Chemical examination of the Ganges water has shown that it has the property of destroying various germs in a short time.

whether there are more objective considerations, distinguishing the Holy Mother's attachment from those of ordinary worldly people. The answer is, there are several such considerations, which we state in brief below :

(1) The disciples of the Holy Mother, who went to her with spiritual motives, no doubt, found her in the entanglements described in this chapter, but they found also that by association with her they themselves got rid of their worldly attachments and attained peace of mind. Several of them became monks, leaving hearth and home. How could this capacity of hers to infuse a spirit of renunciation into others be explained if we equate her attachment with the worldly attachment of ordinary people ?

(2) In the case of worldly attachment we find that in proportion to one's love for a particular object, one's capacity to love others diminishes. Not only that, in pursuing the interests of such narrow and selfish love one often becomes greedy, calculating and callous to the interests of others. In the Holy Mother there was not the slightest trace of these. Renunciation, liberality and a childlike simplicity were second nature with her all through life. In fact her relatives complained that she was too liberal with her possessions without any consideration for the future. And every one who moved closely with her found that while she doted on Radhu on the one hand, she also showed, on the

other, an infinite capacity to shower sweet love and maternal tenderness on her disciples and devotees. As the 'Conversations' in the second part amply show, no one could move with her without feeling that she was one's own mother and much more. In fact her heart was broad as the ocean itself. The salt existing throughout the ocean may be a little concentrated in some particular area, but the very vastness of the ocean assures us that because of this concentration there is no diminution of its salinity elsewhere. So also the element of love permeating her limitless heart remained unaffected by the little concentration of it with reference to certain persons brought about by the special conditions of her life. In this respect the Holy Mother's attachments stand in striking contrast to the worldly attachments of ordinary people.

(3) Attachments always increase in intensity as one goes on cultivating them, and those who are subject to them gradually lose that power of will by which one could cut these bondages of the heart. In other words, attachment generally destroys the power of detachment. This is the rule with all worldly-minded persons. In contrast to this, the truly spiritual person possesses both the power of attachment and detachment in an equal measure. His pure mind, whenever it takes up an undertaking, pursues it with the whole of its energy, and so also it can drop it without the least concern when circumstances require it to do so. The Holy Mother

too possessed this power of detachment in a remarkable degree. Two instances will illustrate the point.

The child of Maku, a niece of the Holy Mother, died of diphtheria at Jayrambati. In the interest of Radhu's health, the Holy Mother was then staying at the Koalpara Ashrama, situated about six miles from Jayrambati. Nera, as this child of Maku was called, was a favourite of the Holy Mother. She had made every possible arrangement for his proper treatment and nursing and was daily sending several messengers to report about his health. Finally, one afternoon the news of his death reached the Mother's ears. She was disconsolate and began to lament like an ordinary person. By and by it was dusk, the time for Aratrika[1] in the shrine. Because of the grief-stricken mood of the Holy Mother, none of the inmates of the Ashrama was disposed to do the worship. The Mother herself now got up, saying it was already late for Aratrika. Her sobbing stopped, and in a perfectly composed manner she did the worship and all the other evening duties of hers like the distribution of Prasad. For the rest of the evening she was found to be in a perfectly normal mood, and, but for a few references to the excellent qualities of the child, she showed no sign of grief at all. This capacity to switch the mind from a

[1] This is a form of service done at particular hours of the day, especially at dusk, the chief feature of which consists in the waving of lighted wicks and camphor before the Deity.

paroxysm of grief to perfect composure is unthinkable in cases of real worldly attachment.

A still more striking example of her power of detachment is noticeable in her attitude towards Radhu during her last days. We have seen how for several years she had been doting on Radhu with an intensity of attachment that is unparalleled in worldly life. But she would say now and then, "You see, my doting on Radhu is a delusion that I have superimposed upon myself", or "My mind does not dwell on Radhu in the slightest degree. I force it on her. I pray to the Master, saying, 'O Lord, please divert my mind a little to Radhu. Otherwise who will look after her?'" The truth of these oft-repeated statements of hers regarding her control even over this very intense form of attachment, was proved when she was on her death-bed. Generally the last days of a person's life, when he is fast sinking, are the times when his worldly attachments and desires express themselves with the greatest force. But in the Holy Mother's case we find that at this critical time she detached her mind completely from Radhu.[1] Worldly people generally like their beloved ones to be by them during their last moments. But the Holy Mother, who could not till then sleep without Radhu by her side, asked her attendants again and again to send Radhu and her cousins back to Jayrambati. Even when their little children approached her bed, she would ask them to be taken away from her,

[1] For interesting details on this subject, see chap. XIX.

saying that she had once for all detached her mind from them, and that their presence by her side was even repugnant to her.[1]

These considerations are enough to make one pause and think, in place of jumping at any hasty conclusion regarding the worldly relationship of the Holy Mother. The more one ponders over it, the more is one struck with wonder at the strange synthesis of human interest and divine grandeur in her life. To the common man and woman this aspect of the Holy Mother's life has an added interest and appeal. For faced as they are with similar domestic problems, they would recognize in her a fellow-sharer of the woes of life and an exemplar of the way in which one should face them. Is it possible for one with domestic responsibilities to practise devotional life? That is a question which comes to all spiritually inclined persons who have worldly duties and responsibilities to fulfil. The Holy Mother's life is both a

[1] To impress still more clearly the difference between the Holy Mother's attitude of mind and true worldly attachment, we draw the reader's attention to the Puranic story of the pious king Bharata. In his last days the king was living the life of a recluse, renouncing his kingdom and spending his whole time in the contemplation of the Divine. But his mind gradually got attached to a young deer which had been rescued by him from danger and was being brought up as his pet. In spite of years spent in holy living, the attachment for the deer manifested itself in all its intensity during his last moments, and he died with his mind full of anxious thoughts about its future welfare. Consequently he had to be reborn in lower levels of existence. The utter purity, non-attachment and spiritual grandeur of the Holy Mother shine vividly by the side of this example.

striking and hope-inspiring answer to this question. Her worldly relationships constitute, as it were, the foil against which the brilliance of her spirituality gains an added significance.

CHAPTER XIV

HER SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

THE ultimate spiritual Principle is often described as a harmony of contradictions. Thus the Upanishads indicate It as permanence behind the impermanent, as unity in multiplicity, as sentiency amidst the insentient. It is the cause of the world, but the world neither exhausts nor contaminates It. Everything subsists in It, but not It in them. Multiplicity has its basis in It, but it fails to destroy Its unity, just as the poison in the fangs of a snake does not affect the snake itself.

The life of every great spiritual personage is an approximation to this cosmic mystery. The true spiritual type marks, as it were, the borderland between humanity and Divinity. Or rather it is Divinity manifesting Itself through the frailties of humanity—God playing the game of hide and seek through the curtain of human personality, now appearing only as man, and the next moment revealing something of His transcendent glory. Such personages are in the world, but not of it.

There seem to be two phases in the character and activities of such personages, intertwined no doubt,

but sufficiently distinguishable by the stress that the one or the other receives according to time and circumstances. On the one side they look quite human and their activities resemble those of worldly men. But unaffected by this aspect, there exists in them another strand so different from anything in the common run of men, carrying with it a sanctifying influence that dissipates the darkness of ignorance from those who come in contact with them. In spite of the apparent conflict between these two phases of life, they coexist in perfect harmony in such great men, adding significance to their lives from the view points of pure spiritual aspirants as well as of those who are in quest of worldly ideals. Such has been the case with some of the great incarnations like Rama and Krishna mentioned in Hindu Scriptures.

In the life of the Holy Mother too this analysis holds good. In the latter part of her life, as depicted in the 'Conversations' comprising the second part, she is seen surrounded by two distinct types of people—her relatives on the one hand and her disciples on the other. Both these groups approached her with quite different motives, the first to gain whatever material advantages they could from her, and the second to serve her and benefit spiritually by her contact. In the preceding chapter her dealings with her relatives have been considered, and in the present one her relation to those who went to her for spiritual illumination will be dealt

with. It is, however, pertinent to inquire how she could fulfil both these apparently incongruous duties without detriment to either. Could it be that there were two water-tight compartments in her personality, so that the spiritual side could remain uncontaminated by worldly dealings? Ultimately this is a riddle which shades off into the mystery of the Deity—the question how He manifests Himself as the world and yet retains His pristine purity. From the analytical point of view, which alone ordinary persons are capable of at their level of thought, some sort of compartmental theory is the only understandable course. There are many utterances of the Holy Mother herself which lend support to the application of this theory to her case. For she is known to have made such statements as the following: "The vision of God is in the palm of my hand. I can have it whenever I want"; "In the midst of worldly activities, whenever I desire, I understand with a flash that all this is nothing but a play of Mahamaya"; "Don't regard me as your relative; I can leave this body at once if I so desire"; "No one will be able to know my real nature so long as I am alive".

But in the case of the Holy Mother, however different these two aspects of her mental life may be in their functioning, one finds an underlying unity in their essence in so far as both of them are the expressions of the great principle of motherhood of which her whole life is a revelation. In our

review of her domestic life, we have shown how the impelling force behind even her worldly attachments was her sense of motherhood,—a form of love that only gives but never thinks of any return, nay, gives even when any return takes the shape of ingratitude and persecution—and how for this reason, even her worldly love bordered on pure spirituality. In her role as a spiritual teacher, too, it is the very same principle of motherhood that is illustrated, perhaps through a medium that reveals the true quality of it, with greater directness.

According to Hindu religious ideals, the relation between the disciple and the Guru (spiritual preceptor) is the most intimate and sacred. The disciple is expected to see in the Guru a channel through which divine mercy manifests itself for his redemption, and as such put implicit faith in his words and obey his commands without questioning. This exalted conception of the Guru entertained by the disciple makes the work of the former a very responsible one. He must be a man of great spiritual attainments, should know the purport of the Scriptures, and must be guided only by love and mercy for suffering humanity in the matter of accepting anyone as a disciple. There must be absolutely no commercial motive. He may, no doubt, accept whatever gifts a disciple offers in love and reverence, but they should never be an incentive to his spiritual ministry. He must be more like a parent —only much nobler than any parent we come across

ordinarily in the world—interested mainly in giving to the loved one, not in receiving any corresponding advantage from him.

Such being the conception of the Guru among the Hindus, there have been few so qualified as the Holy Mother for discharging the onerous responsibilities connected with it. By virtue of her long preparation for this work under Sri Ramakrishna, the direct command he had given her to continue his spiritual mission, and her great spiritual attainments, she was eminently fitted to play the role of a Guru. Besides these qualifications, it was her inherent quality of motherhood, which blossomed to its full proportions about this period,—rendering her so selfless, forgiving, kind and anxious to serve —that distinguished her among the great spiritual teachers of the world.

The idea will be clear if one remembers her own words on the responsibilities she undertook when she initiated anybody as a disciple. "The power of the Guru is transmitted through the Mantra to the disciple," she said once; "that is why the Guru at the time of initiation takes on himself the sins of the disciple and suffers so much from physical maladies. It is extremely difficult to be a Guru; for he has to take the responsibilities for the disciple's sins. He is affected by them. A good disciple, however, helps the teacher. Some disciples make quick progress, and some do it slowly. It depends on the tendencies of the mind acquired by one's past deeds.

That is why Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) hesitates about giving initiation. He said to me, 'Mother, as soon as I initiate a disciple, I feel physically ill. The very mention of the Mantra makes me feel feverish.'"

Probably for the above reason, Swami Brahmananda used to be very sparing in the matter of giving initiation. Hence the vast majority of devotees who sought initiation were sent to the Holy Mother. For, as far as she was concerned, her motherly love and tenderness for all never allowed any such consideration of personal suffering to stand in the way of giving refuge to those who went to her. Referring to this quality of the Holy Mother, Swami Premananda once said, "We are sending to the Holy Mother the poison we could not ourselves take. She is giving refuge to everybody, accepting the sins of all, and digesting the same."

It was her conviction that the great physical sufferings that she had to undergo in life due to illness, were of a vicarious nature, being the effects of the sins she had taken from her disciples. An unsympathetic critic will, of course, pronounce this statement to be a mere rationalization. But there are other incontrovertible facts of her life which show that such powers were present in her. As in the case of the Master, the utter purity of her life, both physical and mental, had endowed her organism with an extreme sensitiveness to anything that was unholy and sinful. Thus it was noticed that when

certain people, evidently with sinful propensities, proceeded to touch her feet, the feet would shrink back even against her will, as if by reflex action. Often her disciples saw how she suffered from a burning sensation due to the indiscriminate touch of people. In 1916, when she attended the Durga Puja at the Belur Math, people without number prostrated themselves before her and touched her feet. A little later, Yogin-Ma saw her washing her feet again and again with the Ganges water. She remonstrated with her, saying, "Mother, what is it that you are doing? You will catch cold." To this the Holy Mother replied, "Well, Yogin, how can I explain it to you? Some people touch my feet, and that refreshes me wonderfully. Again there are others whose touch gives me a terrible burning sensation. I feel it like the sting of a wasp. Only by applying the Ganges water do I get some relief."

Another disciple records a striking example of this phenomenon at Jayrambati. The disciple who was then attending on her had gone out. On returning, he found the Mother lying on a straw mat in the verandah. Seeing the disciple, she said to him, "A rather elderly man came here with L—. Seeing him from a distance, I entered my room and sat on my bed. He was very anxious to salute me by touching the feet. Though I protested and shrank back, he touched my feet by force, as it were. From that time I am almost at the point of death through an unbearable pain in the feet and

the stomach. I washed my feet three or four times; still I cannot get rid of this burning sensation. Had you been here, you would have understood it by a sign from me and forbidden him to touch my feet."

In Calcutta also disciples often noticed such occurrences, especially on certain holidays when the general public was allowed to salute her. But when she spoke of her suffering to any, she would add, "But don't tell it to Sarat (Swami Saradananda). Then he will stop people from coming." So compassionate was she that in spite of her suffering she did not like to deprive others of the satisfaction and relief they derived from her contact.

In the light of this indubitable fact it is intelligible how she could vicariously suffer for her disciples. Indeed, prompted by that motherly love for all, she considered it her proud privilege to suffer for others. When at Koalpara a disciple once hesitated to touch her feet, thinking it would cause her suffering, she said, "No, my child, we are born for this purpose. If we do not accept others' sins and sorrows and do not assimilate these, who else will do so? Who else will bear the responsibilities of the sinners and the afflicted?" During her last illness, when her body had become very much emaciated and she could no longer get up without being helped, her monastic disciples were speaking amongst themselves about her extreme suffering. One of them said, "If the Mother recovers this time, we shall not allow her to give initiation any more. She is suffering so much

because of taking upon herself the sins of so many types of people." On hearing this, the Holy Mother smiled and said, "Why do you say so? Do you think that the Master came only to take Rasagollas[1]?"

Urged by this maternal love, she used to initiate people regardless of the immediate condition of her health. Ill or well, when anybody went to her in a suppliant mood, her tendency was to satisfy him without any thought of her own convenience. Once she was suffering from malaria at Jayrambati, and at the order of Swami Saradananda her attendants were not allowing any one to approach her for initiation. A devotee from Barisal arrived, eager to see the Mother, but the disciples would not let him into her presence. This led to an altercation, hearing which the Mother came to the door and asked the disciple why he was not letting the gentleman in. On being told of Swami Saradananda's prohibition, she said sharply, "Who is Sarat to prohibit? I am born for this purpose. Eat something today. I shall initiate you tomorrow." For the devotee had gone there with the determination that he would eat only after initiation.

On another occasion, she was at Calcutta, just convalescing after severe illness. No devotee was admitted into her presence then, but an exception

[1] Rasagollas are a kind of high class sweets of Bengal. Her meaning was, that it was not to enjoy life but to work for the good of others that Sri Ramakrishna and she were born.

was made in the case of a devoted Parsi young man coming from far away. This young man, as it was natural, asked her for her blessings. At once she said to the disciple attending on her, "Shall I initiate him?" The disciple raised objections and said, "How can you do it in the present state of your health? What will Sarat Maharaj say if he hears of it?" The Mother then asked the disciple to go and ask Swami Saradananda about it. The Swami, however, replied, "What shall I say? If the Mother desires to have a Parsi disciple, let her have one. There is no use telling her anything against her wish." On going back, the disciple found that she had already made the necessary arrangements for initiation. Later on she expressed great satisfaction at this young man's spiritual potentialities.

Thus under the influence of maternal love, she gave initiation to one and all who went to her for blessings. Often she felt that many were unworthy, but her grace was so abounding that she would generally brush aside all considerations of fitness. As she said once to a disciple, "My child, several among those who come here are up to anything in life. No type of sin has been left undone by them. But when they come here and address me as mother, I forget everything and they get more than they deserve."

On account of this extreme liberality and motherly eagerness to serve, the circle of her initiated disciples was very large. Evidently the majority of

these received initiation, not because of any special merit or qualification of theirs, but only through the Mother's infinite kindness. So they were not seen to develop into outstanding spiritual personalities. Bearing this in mind, Yogin-Ma one day said to her humorously, "Look at the Master's disciples. Each one of them is a spiritual giant. But what about your disciples, Mother?" To this the Holy Mother replied, "Is it to be wondered at? He picked out the best types, and with what care he selected them! And towards me he has pushed all this small fry, coming in their hundreds like ants! Don't compare my disciples with his." Further she spoke thus to a disciple, regarding the significance of her initiation: "Whatever I have to give, I have given at the time of initiation. If you want peace immediately, practise the spiritual disciplines prescribed. Otherwise you will achieve it only after the fall of the body."

Some of the disciples attending on her felt that this liberality of hers in the matter of initiation was not quite desirable. Once one of them questioned her thus: "Mother, you give initiation to so many people, but you can't keep all of them in mind. You don't even give a thought to what is happening to them. A Guru has to look after the spiritual unfoldment of the disciple. So it is better that you initiate only as many as you can remember." To this her reply was, "But, my child, the Master never forbade me to do so. He had instructed me on

many things, could he not have told me something about this as well? I give the responsibility of my disciples to the Master. Every day I pray to him saying, 'Please look after the disciples wherever they may be.' Further I received these Mantras from the Master himself. Through these one is sure to achieve perfection."

But it is known for certain that she did concern herself with the spiritual welfare of her disciples in a more active sense. Daily she used to do Japa in very large numbers, and from her own words one understands that this was for the sake of her disciples. During her last illness, though she could not sit up for meditation, she was none the less seen to do Japa. It was also noticed that she would wake up at 2 a.m. Observing this, a disciple asked whether she was not sleeping well at night. Her reply was, "How can I, my child? All these children come to me with great longing and take initiation, but most of them do not practise Japa regularly. Why regularly? They do not do anything at all. But since I have taken their responsibility, should I not see to their welfare? Therefore I do Japa for their sake, and pray to the Master constantly, saying, 'O Lord, awaken their consciousness. Give them liberation. There is a great deal of suffering in this world. May they not be born again!'"

Another striking example of her solicitude for the welfare of all her spiritual children is to be found in her conduct at the time of the Sandhi Puja during

the worship of the Goddess Durga in a certain year. The devotees who were in her company offered pink lotuses at her feet. Thereupon she called a disciple and said, "Bring more flowers. Offer them in the name of Rakhal, Tarak, Sarat, Khoka, Yogin and Golap, as also in the name of all my children whom I may or may not remember." And as the disciple carried out her instruction, she looked for a long time steadily at the Master's picture with folded hands and said, "May all be blessed here and hereafter!"

Among the hundreds of people who approached her for initiation, there were very few whom she refused. Their number may not be more than a dozen. And in these cases it is impossible to say what exactly guided her decision. Probably it was due to a feeling that these people sought initiation from her only with a view to avoiding payments to their family Gurus; for there were instances when she insisted as a condition of her giving initiation, that the disciples would continue, or even enhance, the financial contribution to their family Gurus and show them the same respect as before. Or her refusal might have been by way of test, which these unfortunate souls failed to stand. For we know from the following instance that she considered tests of this kind to be legitimate on the part of a spiritual teacher. A young man, placed in very poor circumstances, went twice or thrice to Jayrambati for initiation, but could not unfortunately succeed

owing to the Holy Mother's illness. So he wrote complaining, "Please do not refuse me any more. It is with great difficulty that I go over there. I want to know whether the next time I come, I shall get initiation or not." In reply the Holy Mother said to a disciple, "A person, whoever he may be, must go back if I am not well. Even if I am well, I cannot invite people to take initiation. People get facilities and opportunities according to their past Karma. A person comes here several times, but does not get the opportunity to see me, either because I am ill or for some other reason. It is his bad luck. What shall I do? You may say that it means a great deal of expense for him, and everybody does not have money. But a Guru may turn away a person seeking to be a disciple, time after time. He who is really eager for the blessing of the Guru, however, will come to him even by begging. The truth is this: He who is really anxious to cross the ocean of the world will somehow break his bonds. No one can entangle him. Financial difficulties, awaiting a reply, the fear of going back with unfulfilled desire—these are mere excuses."

Her motherly love was expressed not only through the liberality with which she gave initiation to spiritual aspirants, but also through the extreme tenderness, sweetness and forbearance that characterized her dealings with the devotees in her everyday life. The consciousness of universal motherhood

was so powerfully operative in her that there were cases of devotees, who had lost their mothers in early days, finding even the very physical likeness of their mothers in her. It may be a subjective experience, but still it is significant in so far as the very subjectivity of it centred round her. While such experiences fell only to the lot of a few, almost everyone who went to her felt that they received from her such love and attention as equalled or even surpassed what their earthly mothers were capable of. Thus when devotees went to her at Jayrambati, she would, so long as she was in health, herself cook for them, serve them, and even insist on removing their leavings. When they protested against such action on her part, or against her serving them on their arrival by fanning and washing their feet, she would silence them by the effective reply, given in a tone of utmost sincerity and with overflowing feeling, "What after all have I done for you? Am I not your mother? Is it not the privilege of a mother to serve her child in every way—even to clean its dirt with her own hand?" There was absolutely no exaggeration in this expression of motherly sentiment. For even this extreme form of service she is known to have performed at Calcutta, when the baby of a lady devotee soiled a carpet in her room. She insisted on cleaning the carpet herself, despite the protests of the devotee who felt greatly embarrassed by her action.

At Jayrambati it was not unusual to see her go from door to door in the early morning for some milk, maybe to feed a sick devotee or to prepare tea for another who found it impossible to begin his day without a cup of that beverage. When any devotee fell ill, she nursed him with as much solicitude as a mother would do. At Jayrambati a young disciple who suffered from itch in the hands was fed by her day after day with her own hand. Sometimes in expectation of the arrival of some beloved disciple, she would preserve for him the cakes or sweets prepared in the house on the previous day. For to feed the devotees was her greatest delight. She would not allow anyone who went to her during meal time to go without food, so much so that it was a constant cause of complaint to Golap-Ma, who did the housekeeping in her Calcutta residence, that she was always required to provide meals for people without any previous notice. Golap-Ma would complain to her, "You entertain here anybody and everybody who comes to you, calling 'mother', 'mother!'" And to devotees who went to her at times other than meal time, she would give sweets, fruits, water and at least two rolls of betel. Though they were trifles, she would give these things with such great affection and warmth that the recipients' hearts would be filled with joy and they would feel great attraction for her. Whenever a devotee took any offering to her, be it even common things like betel leaves, she would express heartfelt delight at it,

irrespective of all consideration of its value. When any dainty came to her, she was in the habit of reserving it for the devotees, and seldom partook of it herself. Thus the special sweets, for instance, sent to Jayrambati for her by Swami Saradananda, would be reserved for distribution among the devotees, both morning and evening. Of all such presents, one part would go to Simhavahini, another to Dharma Thakur, another for some other deities, yet another to neighbours and relatives, and the rest to the devotees—for herself she would hardly reserve anything. She was the mother of all, and her nature was to give, never to preserve anything for herself.

Once a disciple attending on her had to go out to a neighbouring village on business and could return only late in the afternoon. As he had not taken his meal, the Holy Mother too did not take her food at the usual time and waited for his return. The disciple on arrival remonstrated with her for fasting when her health was so bad. But her reply was, "You have not taken your meal; and how could I?" The disciple concerned felt that such loving solicitude could not be expected even of one's own mother.

When the devotees went to her village home at Jayrambati, she always insisted on their staying there and taking rest for at least two or three days. For she would say, "People have to stand so much hardship to come over here. It is easy to visit Gaya or Banaras, but not this place." Often the number of such devotees would go up to ten or twelve, and

they would be arriving at her house at all odd hours, sometimes even at midnight. To feed and maintain all of them was too much a drain on her slender resources. Yet she was all warmth and cordiality when they went to her, and she personally looked after all their comforts both as regards food and accommodation. The one cause of worry for her was that in that out-of-the-way village she could not give any delicacies to the devotees, and so she was very particular about keeping some specially preserved food for their use. And when any devotee took leave of her, it was always a moment of sorrow for her, as it is for any mother at the time of parting from her child. She would, on such occasions, follow them for some distance, and sometimes with eyes wistful and moistened with tears, watch till they were out of sight. While staying in Calcutta in rented houses on the banks of the Ganges, there have been occasions when at dusk she would stand outside the house in rain, only to watch a devotee who had just taken leave of her, crossing the river in a boat. Thus every detail of her conduct towards devotees was impressed with the tinge of her motherly love.

Not only in acts of love and tenderness but even in the way in which she stood the importunities and indiscreet conduct on the part of devotees, she showed herself to be more than a mother to them. In the last few years of her life the number of people who used to visit her in Calcutta was so large that it was a great strain on her to meet them all. It is

said that when she got tired with this rush of people in the city, she went to her village home, but even there she had no rest as her relatives pressed her with their never-ending demands for pecuniary help. Besides, knowing that at Jayrambati one had greater access to her than in the city, many devotees from Calcutta would go over there, some of them arriving at odd hours, even at midnight, without any consideration of problems of accommodation and food, of which she was very particular.

Reference has already been made to the great physical suffering that the Holy Mother had to stand owing to the touch of impure souls. Besides this, on holidays and festive occasions hundreds of people came and offered flowers and cloth at her feet by way of worship, while she was required to sit for hours like an image to accept them. In Calcutta, many devotees who sought her, especially women, went for the fulfilment of their worldly desires, maybe to ask her blessings so that they might have a child, or have some illness cured, or have their financial condition improved. The Mother used to listen patiently to the tales of woe and suffering that even such people brought to her, and it is said that many suppliants of this type also had their desires fulfilled through her blessings.

But the most troublesome devotees were those whose religious fervour was in excess of their common sense. One or two examples of this kind are worth mentioning in order to show how much

torment she had to suffer at their hands. One day at the Udbodhan Office, the Holy Mother had just finished her daily worship, when a devotee carrying some flowers in his hand came to see her. At the sight of the stranger she wrapped herself with a sheet and sat down on her bedstead, with her feet resting on the floor. The devotee offered the flowers at her feet and saluted her. Then he sat in front of her and began to do breathing exercises! As the other inmates of the house were busy with their work, there was no one by her side at that time. The devotee continued his breathing exercises, and the Holy Mother, sitting in that position with her whole body covered up, began to feel uncomfortable. Just then Golap-Ma happened to come. She understood the whole situation. She roused the man from his meditation and rebuked him sharply, saying, "Do you think that you are before a wooden image and would awaken life in it by your breathing exercises? Have you no sense? Don't you see the Mother is feeling warm?"

Another day a devotee, while saluting the Holy Mother, forcibly struck his head against her big toe. It hurt her very much and she uttered a cry of pain. Those who were by her side asked the person why he did so, and his reply was that he had purposely pained her, so that she might remember him on account of that pain!

One can estimate from the account given above what an amount of patience and forbearance was

required to stand all this eccentricity of the devotees. There was nothing she had to gain from them. Nor had she the least interest in being lionized by society. All the worship and praise that the devotees bestowed on her produced no impression on her mind. In these respects she was a true follower of Sri Ramakrishna, for whom money was no consideration in judging one's personal worth, and honour and publicity matters of utmost abhorrence. Thus pure maternal love, irrespective of all considerations of the worth or fitness of the objects towards which it was directed, was the only motive-force behind her long and arduous work as a spiritual teacher.

It is now necessary to deal with another subject connected with the Holy Mother's spiritual ministry, namely, her ways of imparting instruction to disciples and guiding them in their spiritual life. One of the most remarkable features of this phase of her life was her catholicity. It is definitely known that she never imposed the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna on anyone, although she recognized the value of a true understanding of him in the spiritual growth of her disciples. Before she gave a Mantra to a disciple, she generally consulted the religious traditions of his family, whether it was Vaishnava, Saiva or Sakta, as also his own spiritual inclinations. There were cases of disciples who pleaded ignorance regarding the religious traditions of their family, denied preference for any form of the Deity, and gave her the

entire responsibility of selecting an ideal for them. In the case of others, it was not always that she acted according to their traditions or inclinations. She would also meditate and see whether the intuition of her mind coincided with what they apparently thought to be their path. It is said that when, at the time of initiation, she made her mind passive and withdrew into the depths of her being, the Mantra suited to the disciple's spiritual evolution would flash in her mind. If the disciple was pure and possessed true spiritual aspiration, the Mantra appeared to her with the utmost quickness. In the case of others it took a little time.

In these moments of introspection she often saw the spiritual future of the disciples. A remarkable instance of this from the life of a well-known monk of the Ramakrishna Order may be mentioned here. He took initiation from the Holy Mother when he was a college student and had no idea of becoming a monk. After initiation it is customary to present some fruits, flowers, cloth and money to the teacher according to one's capacity. The disciple concerned placed before her some fruits and flowers with a rupee. She then said that she did not accept any money as gift from monks. The disciple reminded her that he was not a monk but a student who lived a worldly life. Still she did not accept it on the same ground as before. Thrice the disciple reminded her, and every time she gave the same answer. A few years after, this disciple actually

became a member of the Ramakrishna Order. Evidently she divined his future at the time of initiation.

In case her intuition showed her that the family tradition or the apparent inclination of a disciple was not in the proper line of his spiritual evolution, she did not hesitate to put him on the right track, though it might be entirely new to him for the time being. We may cite here an example of this, too, from the life of another distinguished monk of the Ramakrishna Order. When he took initiation from the Holy Mother, he had already been repeating a Mantra and was deriving much peace and bliss from it. He found, however, that the ideal and the instructions she gave him at the time of initiation were totally different from what he was till then following with so much benefit. He felt rather bewildered on account of this and communicated his feelings to the Holy Mother. But to this she said in reply, "This is better." These few words of the Mother had a miraculous effect on the disciple. He felt an immediate transformation in the spiritual attitude he was cultivating. The feeling of hesitancy to accept the Mantra given by the Mother disappeared altogether, and he felt there was perfect harmony between the new ideal and his spiritual past. This experience convinced the disciple of the value of a true Guru—of how such a teacher could set an aspirant on the right track and appease the conflicts and struggles within his mind.

Another incident from the life of the same disciple reveals the great competency of the Holy Mother as a teacher of men. This disciple was once seized with an intense spirit of renunciation and yearning for God, subsequent to the demise of a great spiritual luminary of the Ramakrishna Order, whom he respected very much. Thenceforth, he spent about a year and a half in an Ashram far from the haunts of men, observing silence and devoting fourteen hours a day to Japa and meditation. This strenuous discipline ultimately told on his nerves. Gradually he felt as if his mind was refusing to work, and began to experience a sense of vacancy in the brain. He, therefore, gave up the practice of meditation for a time and devoted himself to scriptural studies. By this change he did not feel any relief as far as the condition of the brain was concerned. So he left for Calcutta, where the senior Swamis of the Belur Math put him on nourishing diet and had him treated by a renowned Ayurvedic physician. Even this did him no good. It struck him just then that he should consult the Holy Mother. She was then in her village. He, therefore, went to Jayrambati and explained to her his condition. When she heard of the nature of the meditation he had been doing, she shuddered and told him that he was following methods of meditation which one should adopt only in the highest stage of spiritual practice. She then gave him some simple directions for meditation, and by following these he soon felt his nerves getting

soothed and his complaints all disappearing. This incident shows how this simple, uneducated and unostentatious lady knew all the profound secrets of spiritual life and was ready to help her disciples when they got stranded on the spiritual path.

It has been noted before that she never forced the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna on anyone. But she seems to have held the view that in the case of those who took initiation from her, spiritual advancement would be accelerated if they accepted the true spiritual identity of Sri Ramakrishna. Once an old man went to the Holy Mother with the notion that Sri Ramakrishna was a saintly person, and that the Holy Mother, being his spiritual consort, would have some of his powers. He had no idea about Sri Ramakrishna's being a divine incarnation. When he was brought in for initiation, the Holy Mother at once understood his mentality and called out to Yogin-Ma, "O Yogin, this man does not accept the Master. What am I to do?" Yogin-Ma said in reply, "Initiate him. The Mantra you give will never be fruitless." He was given initiation, and it was noticed that through her grace he became a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna in a short time.

Her attitude in this respect may be explained this way. The spiritual progress of those whom she initiated was guided not merely by their effort but also by the connection they established with Sri Ramakrishna through her. The great austerities performed by the Master were not for his own sake

but for the good of the world at large. For it is not within the power of ordinary human beings, with their many weaknesses and limitations, to strive independently and escape from the hands of Maya. They require the help of a redeeming power to supplement their little strength. In the spiritual energy generated by Sri Ramakrishna's austerities lies that reserve of power which aspirants can make use of for their upliftment. But it is only by accepting him whole-heartedly that they can get into touch with the spiritual energy accumulated by him. Otherwise they would be excluding themselves from it.

In a few cases she is known to have diverted the tendencies of people from evil ways by an effort of her will. Thus she cured a disciple, who was an inveterate drunkard, of his bad habit; changed the mind of a girl who was trying to seduce a young man; and converted to the path of holy living a young wife who was heading towards ruin in a fit of revenge against her husband who had taken to an exclusively religious life against her will. But she did not effect such conversions very often. When some disciples asked her for an explanation of this, contrasting it with the example of Sri Ramakrishna who had effected many such striking cases of conversion, her reply was that it was not given to her to do so, as her spiritual ministry was to be long and extensive. In effecting such conversion one had to spend on a few the spiritual energy that was meant for the many. According to her the earthly life of

the Master was cut short because of the tremendous amount of spiritual energy he had to spend on men of exceptionally evil dispositions.

There are many devotees of the Holy Mother who claim to have had experiences of a highly mystical type in the course of their relationship with her. Some had seen her in dream as a Goddess in human form, though they never had occasion to see even a picture of hers before. Others had received either full or partial Mantra and spiritual instruction from her in dream, and at the time of their initiation were astonished to find that the Mantra she gave them in the waking state tallied exactly with what they had got in dream. Still others claim that they were rescued from great dangers during critical situations in their lives by the help she rendered them either in dream or in the waking state. As most of these experiences are of a subjective nature and the persons concerned are not men of note, the general reader may not be interested in the citation of such instances.

But one example of such mystic experience is worth recording, because it relates to Girish Chandra Ghosh, who was a first-rate genius and ranks among the greatest dramatists of India and of the world. Now, Girish Chandra was among the staunchest of Sri Ramakrishna's householder devotees. But like many others among them, he did not at first think very highly of the Holy Mother's spiritual greatness. Some years after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, he went on a visit to Jayrambati along with some of the

monastic disciples of the Master. That was the first occasion when Girish was taken to the Holy Mother's presence. After prostrating himself before her, he looked at her once, and immediately withdrew from there and sat in the outhouse in a very serious and introspective mood. His companions were astonished at this transformation of Girish. At last Swami Niranjanananda approached him and asked him the reason for it. Girish thereupon wanted him to inquire of the Holy Mother, whether she was not the person who had appeared to him in dream in his nineteenth year. In reply the Holy Mother sent him the information that she was. Then Girish gave out the story to his fellow-disciples. At the age of nineteen he was suffering from a severe illness. The doctors had given him up for lost. In that condition he dreamt one night that the whole sky was lit with a celestial effulgence. It gradually proceeded towards him and assumed the form of a Goddess. Girish, it must be remembered, was in those days a rank atheist. The Goddess approached him and said, "Well, my child, you are suffering terribly. Aren't you?" Then she put something into his mouth, resembling the consecrated food of the Puri temple, and vanished. After that Girish gradually recovered from his illness. He had often tried to make out who that figure might have been, but could get no definite clue. So he had surmised that it must have been the figure of his mother whom he had lost in his early childhood. But the day on which he saw the Holy Mother, he

was surprised to notice the likeness of that Goddess in her. Thenceforth he looked upon the Holy Mother with great reverence, and used to say that through the grace of Niranjan (Swami Niranjananda) he had recovered his 'mother'.

Whatever might be the significance of these uncommon experiences, the Holy Mother, as we have seen, was most simple and human in her everyday life, without the least touch of mysteriousness or occultism about her. Excepting the wisdom she manifested, there was nothing out of the way about her. Her tendency was always to encourage the disciples to seek for knowledge, devotion and dispassion, and not to be always waiting for visions and occult phenomena. According to her, if psychic experiences came, it was well and good. But, as she once said to a disciple who felt sorry for not having had any vision, these experiences were not of much consequence. They were only by-products of the spiritual life. Its essence was in something else. As to her conception of true spiritual evolution, she once said in her simple and yet expressive way, "What else does one obtain by the realization of God? Does one grow a pair of horns? No. One's mind becomes pure, and through the pure mind, knowledge and illumination are awakened."

Even in her manner of initiation she was very unconventional, reducing ritual and ceremonial to the very minimum. Generally she initiated people after her morning worship. But in exceptional

circumstances, she discarded even this rule and initiated them at any hour and under any condition. Once she initiated a person during the period of mourning, considered to be a time of defilement, saying "There is no connection between the spirit and the body. The talk of defilement due to death is meaningless." Sometimes she is known to have given initiation in the verandah or under the eaves of her house. A young devotee who was a police suspect, because of alleged implication in the nationalistic movement, and could not therefore be accommodated in her house at Jayrambati, was initiated by her, sitting on straw for a seat in the midst of an open meadow. Once she initiated a man in the compound of a railway station, an umbrella serving as the roof and the rain water collected in the depression made by a cow's hoof as the water for purificatory purposes.

Generally initiation by her took only a very short time. On this point Swami Saradananda was once questioned by a disciple, as to how it was that the Holy Mother took only two or three minutes to initiate a disciple, while he took about half an hour. To this the Swami replied that the very touch or will of the Holy Mother was sufficient assurance that the disciple had been surrendered to, and accepted by, the Master, whereas in his case some time must be spent in meditation before he received that assurance.

Besides giving Mantra to people, the Holy Mother also used to give the vows of Brahmacharya (celibacy practised by a novice) and Sannyasa

(renunciation of the world) to the members of the Ramakrishna Order. In such cases, what she used to do was to convey to the disciples the inner spirit for which these institutions stood, and symbolize her having done this by giving the Brahmacharin's dress or the Sannyasin's ochre cloth to the disciples. She would then ask them to go to Swami Brahmananda and perform the appropriate ceremonies with the chanting of holy texts.

Thus she had a very large number of disciples both monastic and lay. She would often seem to be very tender and specially considerate to the latter class, seeing that they had to face innumerable worries and difficulties in the world. Her heart, so full of motherly sympathy, could not help doing so. She also told certain householder devotees, perhaps to appease some conflict of ideals in their mind, "Is the ochre robe everything? You will attain spiritual realization without all this. What is the need of taking the ochre cloth?" She would also refer sometimes to how for some the ochre robe became only a source of vanity, and say that it would be far better to be like herself, wearing the white dress of the householder but observing Sannyasa in practice. There were also occasions when she asked unmarried young men to marry and settle down in life with the remark, "Why can't one lead a good life if one is married? The mind alone is everything. Did not the Master marry me?"

This has led some to think that the Holy Mother stood more for the ideal of the householder than for

that of the monk. This, however, is a hasty conclusion. For, Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother have, by the many-sidedness of their lives, set the ideals for men and women of all countries and in all stations of life. Still it may not be wrong to state that, more than in the life of the Master or any of his disciples one finds in the Holy Mother the fulfilment of the ideal of inner Sannyasa—of being in the world but not of it. But that is not to say that she minimized the importance of the ideal of Sannyasa. We have seen how, when she went on pilgrimage, she visted the great Sannyasins in those places. Once while she was staying at Kamarpukur, perhaps on the second occasion after the Master's passing, a Sannyasin visited the village. She built a hut for him, gave all necessaries for his daily food, and went to salute him every morning. In later days when Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Order visited her, she would ask Radhu and other nieces of hers to salute them. Once a householder devotee quarrelled with a monk and used harsh words. The Holy Mother advised Him never to do so, but always show respect to monks; for, she said. "One word or one thought of a monk may injure a householder." She once snubbed her niece Nalini very severely for speaking slightingly of the monks. One day while a monastic disciple was sitting before the Holy Mother, a woman devotee passed that way, touching the back of the disciple with the corner of her cloth through carelessness. At this the Mother said very sharply,

" What have you done ? He is a monk and you have touched him with the edge of your cloth ! You must be respectful to him. Take the dust of his feet." Another day a much-respected lady devotee of the Master had some exchange of hot words with a Brahmacharin at the Udbodhan Office and went away in anger, saying, " If he stays in this house, I cannot remain here." When it was reported to the Holy Mother, she was not at all sympathetic towards the lady devotee's attitude and said, " Who is she ? A householder ! She should not have taken offence with a monk in that manner. Let her go away if she pleases. The monks have renounced everything for my sake and are staying here." She would often remark to her disciples, " Ah ! with whom shall I live if there are no self-renouncing Sannyasins about me ? "

The following incident is also a striking illustration of her deep regard for the monastic ideal and the appreciation she had of its value in developing the spiritual life of certain types of aspirants : A young disciple of hers, having made up his mind to adopt the monastic life, went to her for permission to do so. At first she tried to dissuade him from that course and cross-questioned him with a view to knowing his real intentions. But on being convinced of his earnestness, she said, " What is there in the worldly life ? What an inordinate attachment people have for it ? See how out of one so many come out, and how one's attention and energies are all

dissipated. Is it possible for a person placed under such conditions to attain to spiritual greatness? Have you not seen crabs? The mother crab peeps out of her hole again and again, and then goes down. It struggles hard repeatedly to free itself, but fails. And why? Because of her attraction for her numerous progeny living in the hole. This attraction drags her into the hole in spite of all her efforts. Such is the case of those who are immersed in worldly life."

In fact, the Holy Mother respected both the ideals —that of the Sannyasin and that of the householder —but disliked the vanities of the followers of either. Renunciation, whether accompanied by the garb or not, was the essential thing. Provided that was present, both the ideals took one to the highest goal. But, as the section on "Conversations" will show, she always encouraged a person to lead a celibate life, if she found him fit for it. In the case of girls, too, she would recommend celibacy to such of them as were drawn to the ideal of complete renunciation. One day a devotee requested the Holy Mother to order her daughter to marry. But the Holy Mother replied, "Is it not a misery to remain in lifelong slavery to another and always dance to his tune?" She said that though there was some risk in being a celibate, still, if one was not inclined to lead a married life, one should not be forced into it and subjected to lifelong worldliness. Such cases she characterized as intolerable oppression. But in the case of those for whose spiritual evolution she found

the married life more suited, she certainly recommended that course, without creating any conflict of ideals in their mind. She would say to them, "Do you not see everything in this world in couples—two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet and so on? So also the male and female principles?"; or "Everything is in the mind. Don't you see that the Master married me?"

In the matter of social relationship, however, she always insisted that the householder must show due regard to the Sannyasin, and herself set the example in that respect.

CHAPTER XV

GLIMPSES OF HER PERSONALITY

THE Holy Mother was about medium height and quite well-built for an Indian woman. In her early days she was not stout, but towards middle age she showed a tendency to corpulency, as women often do. But as she grew older, she again became slim, and it was in that period that most of the devotees had occasion to meet her. In her complexion and general appearance, too, there was a marked difference between her early and later days. On being questioned about her appearance in her youth, she described it as quite pretty. It is said that when she returned to Calcutta from Kamarpukur for the first time after the Master's passing away, Swami Premananda's mother was very much struck by her prepossessing appearance and asked her, "Mother, wherefrom did you get such exquisite beauty and charm?" Surabala, her insane sister-in-law, used to say that when she saw her first, she would appear radiant as she sat in meditation. But this was in her 'pre-Radhu' days, when she used to be in highly exalted spiritual states and spend all her time in meditation and devotional practices. After the coming of

5. THE HOLY MOTHER AT FIFTY-EIGHT

Radhu, when, to quote the Mother's own words, 'Maya laid her hands on her', such external expressions of her inner beauty ceased altogether.

When most of her disciples saw her, she was in a declining state of health owing to age and frequent attacks of malaria. Her general appearance had by then deteriorated to a great extent. Her complexion at that time was somewhat dark, but even then there was in it a mellowness and subdued glow, lending an exquisite grace to her form. A monk who saw her at the age of forty describes her as having the delicacy and tenderness of a maiden in her countenance, as speaking only words of sympathy and compassion, as possessing an inexpressible celestial luminosity in her looks, and as conveying to one and all the impression that she was one's own mother. It was in fact a subtle grace and quiet dignity, rather than any extraordinary physical beauty or awe-inspiring majesty of form, that marked her out from others. But this was evident only on careful scrutiny, and owing to her plain looks and unassuming manners, a superficial observer unacquainted with her could never pick her out from the company of other women. Once, while she was in Banaras, a Marwari woman came to see her. She was then seated with Golap-Ma who had a rather imposing appearance. The woman took Golap-Ma to be the Holy Mother and went towards her to make prostration. She thereupon pointed out the Mother to her, but the Mother, out of a spirit of mischievous

fun, directed her to Golap-Ma as the saintly woman she was seeking. Golap-Ma once more showed the Mother to her, but the Mother was bent on misdirecting her once again. This went on a few times until Golap-Ma called out to the woman in an excited tone, "Can't you distinguish between a mere human face and the face of a divine being?" These words at once drew the woman's attention to that subtle and elusive charm in the Mother's face—to that gentle dignity and incorporeal beauty which we associate with the expression of Gods and Goddesses. Indeed, only comparisons drawn from the conception of divine agencies can adequately convey an idea of the sublime expressiveness in the lines and curves of the face of one, whose whole life had been dedicated to the pursuit of holiness and the practice of forbearance, innocence and loving service.

This combination of gentleness, dignity and grace gave her that maternal pose which no one who went to her failed to notice. It inspired reverence in one's mind without creating the least sense of inaccessibility. One felt the utmost freedom in her company, but one also got a feeling of elevation and an apprehension that one was before a presence that was something more than merely human. Many a person who went to her with a list of questions felt no inclination to ask them when they were actually before her; for they found their doubts dissolving in the sense of peace and exaltation that her

presence conveyed. To restore faith and courage in the wavering, to inspire confidence in the weak, to disperse the clouds of despair and depression, were powers which her personality always carried with it. But all this was not done by any sort of aggressive influence, such as we associate with a militant personality. It was more through that sense of consolation which the loving touch of a mother conveys to an ailing child. For even the most wicked disciple felt that he was near and dear to her, that she had no eye to his failings, that there was no error too grievous for her forgiveness, and that if he would but open his heart, her overflowing sympathy and assurance of divine protection would heal the wounds of his soul. When she was requested not to allow a certain young disciple to come to her presence on account of some misconduct on his part, she remarked, "If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?" When a woman who had led a bad life went to her in a mood of sincere repentance and made an unreserved confession of her sins, she embraced her with great warmth of feeling, uttering these words of assurance, "Don't despair for whatever you have done. You will get over all your sinful tendencies." She also gave initiation to that woman.

A unique feature of her maternal love was its constitutional disinclination to notice the faults of others. In this respect she combined in herself the

nature of a loving mother and that of an innocent child—the mother in her making her too big-hearted to count the errors of her children as of any significance, and the child in her insulating her vision from the perception of evil by her utter innocence. We have already referred to her prayer at Brindavan to have the fault-finding tendency blotted out from her. Her prayer was literally answered. For it is said that even if any action proceeding from the littleness of men happened to meet her eyes as she passed by, her gaze, with its characteristic innocence, as of a little girl, would take no notice of it. Golap-Ma was once scolding a maidservant. When the Holy Mother asked her the reason for it, she said in a pique, " Mother, what is the good of telling you? You cannot see the defects of others." To this the Mother replied in a mild voice, " Well, Golap, there is no want of people to see the faults of others. The world will not come to a standstill if I am otherwise." The secret of that tremendous patience and forgiveness which she displayed in her dealings with her kinsfolk and disciples was this combination of motherliness and childlike innocence in her character.

It has been repeatedly emphasized that the Holy Mother's life and personality form a striking revelation of the universal principle of Motherhood. The expression of this quality in her was not restricted to her relationship with her disciples and relatives. It extended in a general sense to her attitude towards all. Her heart was very sensitive to the woes and

sufferings of those round about her, and, as she herself said, she often lost herself in compassion. No one in distress went to her without being helped with food, clothing or money according to her capacity.

In Jayrambati there was a woman named 'Bhavani's mother' who had none to look after her in her old age and sickness. She found a refuge in the Holy Mother, and it was she who looked after her till death.

There was another woman in her village belonging to the Banerji family, who was suffering from a foul cancer in the ear. Everyone including her kith and kin avoided her. Her pitiable condition came to the Holy Mother's notice, and when a young disciple from the Koalpara Ashram went to visit her one day, she reported the matter to him with much feeling. At this the disciple suggested that he would like to take the patient to the Koalpara Ashram for nursing. The Holy Mother was thrilled with joy to hear this, but the next moment she controlled herself and told him that he could take her there only with the permission of the president of that Ashram. So the disciple went to Koalpara and came back next day with a cart, after getting the necessary permission. He noticed that on seeing his arrival for taking away the woman, the Holy Mother's face was lit up with an expression of joy and exaltation that he had never seen in any other face. That day he had a glimpse of what is meant by disinterested love.

The Holy Mother also evinced keen interest in the flood and famine relief operations of the Ramakrishna Mission, and always encouraged her disciples to co-operate in such activities. Whenever anyone returned from relief work, she would make detailed enquiries about the sufferings of the people and the extent of the relief given. Her heart was always moved by stories of human suffering.

Her motherly love obliterated every vestige of the vanity of position from her, and endowed her with a readiness to do even menial service to others, and silently forgo her own comforts and conveniences so as to save trouble for others. It has already been seen how self-forgetful she was in the service of her disciples and relatives. Once Akshay Kumar Sen, a disciple of hers and the author of the metrical biography of Sri Ramakrishna, entitled *Ramakrishna Punthi*, sent some vegetables to Jayrambati with a coolie woman. As it was evening when she arrived, she was allowed to spend the night at the Mother's house. Being a malarial patient, she got at night high fever with vomiting. Before others had got up, the Holy Mother went into her room early in the morning and saw the place scattered with the vomit. At once she herself removed the dirt and washed the room with water. There were others in the house to do this work, but she knew that they would scold the woman severely and she wanted to save her from it.

At Jayrambati a disciple once noticed that the Holy Mother was removing her bed into the kitchen during nights. On enquiry he learnt from her that she had been doing so for some days past, as she found her room too uncomfortable. Though the Holy Mother asked him not to worry about it, the disciple went into her room and found the cot and other things full of bugs. Immediately he set himself to cleaning them. He was, however, astonished to note that the Holy Mother had never told anybody about it, because she preferred herself to be inconvenienced rather than trouble others for her sake.

It was not only the erring and the sinful that found consolation in her love, but even those who were held in dread by society for their wickedness. None was excluded from her motherly sympathy. When her house at Jayrambati was being built, they employed a number of Mohammedans of a neighbouring village as labourers. Originally their profession was to rear silkworms, but owing to foreign competition they were thrown out of employment, and they turned to robbing and dacoity as their means of livelihood. So when they were employed for the construction of the Holy Mother's house, there was regular consternation among the villagers. But afterwards they remarked that through the Mother's grace even these dacoits turned into devotees. Actually, one day one of these Mohammedans brought her some bananas and said, " Mother, I have

brought these for the Master. Would you accept them?" The Holy Mother accepted the offering very gladly. A lady devotee who was standing by thereupon told her, "I know these people are thieves. Why do you accept their things for the Master?" She replied to her in a solemn tone, "I know who is good and who is bad."

Among these Mohammedans, there was one named Amjed whom the Mother took into her house for a meal. He was seated in the verandah and Nalini, her niece, was serving him. Owing to caste scruples, Nalini was standing at a little distance from him and throwing the various items of food into his plate. At this the Holy Mother remarked, "If you serve a person in this way, can he eat with relish? You give the things to me, I shall serve him." After he had finished eating, the Holy Mother herself washed the place where he had taken food. Nalini was shocked at this and exclaimed, "O aunt, you are going to lose caste." The Holy Mother snubbed her with the remark, "Keep quiet. Even this Amjed is my son, exactly in the sense that Sarat (Swami Saradananda) is!"

Even this example does not represent the limit of her all-embracing love. For in spite of her upbringing in a very restricted environment, her maternal instinct led her to a level of thought which would not allow any considerations of race or country to interfere with the free play of her universal love. Once, during the time of the Durga

Puja, she asked a disciple to purchase some cloth for the children of her brothers. He purchased only cloth of Indian make, but the women of the family did not approve of it and made suggestions as to what they wanted. The disciple, out of patriotic feeling, replied in an excited voice, "But what you want are all foreign cloth. How can I buy them?" The Holy Mother was present there. She said with a smile, "My child, they (the Western people) too are my children. I must accommodate everyone. Can I ever be exclusive? Buy the things they want."[1]

[1] Later on this disciple noticed that whenever she wanted foreign goods, she would not ask him to procure them. She would send someone else. For she always respected others' sentiments. Besides, this shows that she approved of the nationalistic spirit; only it was too narrow for her who was the mother of all.

But she did feel terrible indignation at some of the high-handed acts of certain police officers in suppressing the nationalist movement. Once two young women of the District, who were expectant mothers, were arrested on suspicion and made to walk a long distance to the police station. The news agitated the Mother very much, and with great indignation she said, "Is this due to the Government orders, or to the ingenuity of the police official? We had never heard of such oppression of innocent women in the times of the good Queen Victoria. (Like many people of the old generation, the Holy Mother seems to have been an admirer of Queen Victoria to whose rule she referred now and then.) If this has been done under the orders of the Government, the sin of this unrighteous act will tell on them. Were there no men near by to rescue the poor girls?" Shortly after, she was glad to hear the news that the women were released.

For the information of those who favour the extensive use of home-made cloth, we may also mention here that she wanted some disciples to start a weaving factory instead of merely crying out patriotic slogans. She herself expressed a desire to spin if she could get a spinning wheel.

This was not a mere passing sentiment with her, but a conviction which she used to reiterate whenever occasion arose. When the disciples spoke to her about many people in the West accepting Sri Ramakrishna's teachings after Swami Vivekananda visited those parts, she would remark, "Those people are also my children. What do you say?" In later days Western devotees like Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Ole Bull, Sister Christine, Sister Devamata and others came to India from time to time. In spite of her early training amidst rigidly orthodox surroundings, she mixed with them all very intimately, at times even eating and sleeping with them in the same room.

Indeed, this breaking of the bonds of caste consciousness was another achievement of her maternal consciousness. She was not a breaker of caste in the manner of social reformers. For it was never her intention to give a violent shock to anyone by breaking long-established traditions. What happened was that before her maternal love the impediment of narrow rules and restrictions automatically gave way. We have already seen how in the case of the Mohammedan labourer and Western devotees she broke the rules of caste. Often she would place articles of food from her plate in the hands of disciples of a lower caste and continue to eat without washing her hands. There have been occasions when she offered to the Master rice cooked by non-Brahmin disciples and partook of it herself. Even

the so-called untouchable castes were not excluded from the pale of her liberality. Once at Jayrambati a sweeper brought her a straw-ring for supporting water jars. She asked him to keep it in the verandah of the house. But her sister-in-law, who had strong caste prejudices, began to make a fuss and abuse the man for touching things belonging to their house. The Holy Mother, however, consoled the man, saying that he had done nothing wrong, and also gave him some pice for refreshments. Such conduct on the part of a high-class Brahmin lady of her position was in those days considered sacrilegious from the point of view of strict caste etiquette. Her all-embracing heart, however, broke the bonds of these restrictions, but not as a deliberate revolt against established social conventions or in an attitude of contempt towards them.

The spirit of motherhood thus shone through the various phases of her life and character. In fact, her whole life is a revelation of this cosmic principle, wherein humanity and divinity meet. Man's highest conception of God can only be in terms of the noblest sides of his nature. Hence motherhood—which marks the peak of human character in the achievement of love, forgiveness, selflessness and service—has rightly been held as the perfect symbol of Divinity. To those of the present generation, the Holy Mother is the most illustrious example of the expression of this principle in human terms, and as such they may see in her an embodiment of

Divinity. In the light of this explanation one can understand the import of her words, "Sri Ramakrishna left me behind to manifest the Motherhood of God to the world." Once a monastic disciple told her, "Mother, after having seen you, people will no more respect the various Goddesses." Her significant reply was, "Why not? They are all my parts."

Another very striking feature of her personality was her reverence for what she called the 'Master' (*i.e.* Sri Ramakrishna), to her the equivalent of God as man. It has already been mentioned how, during the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna, he formed the centre of all her thought and activity. Even after his physical disappearance, a sense of his presence as a living, palpitating reality continued to be the groundwork of her earthly consciousness. It has been pointed out before that the Master appeared to her in a vision and told her that death for him meant only passing from one room to another. She had verification of this fact in the visions she had of him and in the help and guidance she received from him at all times of crises in her life.

This experience of hers was not a mere subjective feeling, but a fact guaranteed by other objective considerations. She had heard from the Master himself, as recorded in her conversations, that even after his passing, he would continue to live in his subtle body in the hearts of his devotees for three hundred years to come, after which he would appear on earth

once again. This statement has to be understood in the light of the fact that the Master was not an ordinary soul born on earth to reap the fruits of his own Karma, or to attain personal salvation, but a Divine Incarnation come to fulfil the need of humanity for a new guide and helper in its spiritual struggle. An Incarnation therefore does not pass out of the sphere of the cosmic scheme when his physical body perishes, as an ordinary enlightened soul (Mukta-purusha) does at death. The Incarnation survives in his subtle body and continues to serve as a medium for the expression of Divine mercy, of which his personality is an embodiment. He continues to do so until he takes another physical embodiment, inaugurating a new age in the life of mankind. Those who serve the cause of the Incarnation and commune with him in sincere devotion and self-surrender, can contact his personality and receive his protection and guidance in their spiritual strivings. The sense of presence which the Holy Mother had with regard to Sri Ramakrishna is only an illustration of this truth.

The Master's presence was a reality to her in a very intimate sense. One found this from the way in which she did his daily worship and offering, which had a uniqueness of its own. Her worship looked more like the actual service of the Master and direct communion with him rather than a ritualistic procedure. In fact she employed no rituals at all. The things for offering, such as

flowers, sandal paste and fruits were all prepared either by herself or someone else. She was very particular that this was done with scrupulous neatness and precision, exactly as one would do for the reception of a living person. Her actual worship consisted only in placing the flowers before the Master with loving devotion and in meditating for a while, which took in all about half an hour.

It was the way in which she made the food offering that, more than anything else, conveyed a sense of her intimate perception of the Master. After arranging the food, she would address the Master as one would a living person, and say, "Please come and take your food." At Jayrambati she was often heard to tell the Master on the Jagaddhatri Puja days, "O Lord, finish your meal a little quickly today. I have to attend the Jagaddhatri Puja." This behaviour of hers would be puzzling until it is understood that she actually used to visualize the Master partaking of the food. She used to say that he took it in three ways. Either he actually partook of the offering, or a ray of light from his forehead touched the food, or he only indicated his acceptance without actually partaking of the food. Never would she be satisfied until she found the Master accepting the food, and no food would she herself take unless it was accepted by him.

A remarkable example of this took place when she was once invited by a family of devotees at Calcutta, well-known among the followers of

Sri Ramakrishna. Though devoted, the reputation of that family was not all clean. Now, when the Holy Mother went there, she was requested to offer cooked food to the Master in the family shrine. Being very much pressed, she agreed to do so. But as she said later on, she found the Master reluctant to accept the food; for he could accept no food other than what came from pure souls. Finally, after much prayer, he just touched a bit of the Payasa (a kind of porridge) to his tongue. That day the Holy Mother was observed not to eat anything from the rich variety of dishes served to her. With some difficulty she swallowed a little Payasa. For she could not bring herself to eat anything that the Master had not taken.

Even when she travelled long distances, she would not take food without offering it to the Master. She would break the journey at some convenient place, cook the food, offer it to the Master and then partake of it. A striking event, illustrative of her non-ceremonial devotion and living contact with the Master, took place once on her way to Jayrambati. Arrangements had been made for cooking rice in an earthen pot. But in the act of getting the pot down, it dropped from a disciple's hand and broke, throwing its contents out. All were perplexed as to what they would offer that noon, but not the Holy Mother. She gathered the clean rice from the top layers, and offered it to the Master, saying, " O Lord, you must be satisfied with this to-day." She knew

that the Lord she worshipped was a living presence, one near and dear to her, who did not stand by any ceremonial consideration.

Another instance, illustrating how the Master was a living presence to her, will not be out of place. In the procedure of worship followed at the Udbodhan Office, it was customary to pick the best of the offered flowers, remove the water from them and decorate the photograph of the Master with them when he was put to sleep. One day, while the Holy Mother was taking rest in the afternoon, she dreamt that the Master had got up from bed and was on the floor. Surprised at this, she woke up, approached the Master's bed, and saw the photograph covered with ants. Evidently the ants had come from the flowers, and her dream indicated that they disturbed the rest of him who was a living presence to her. Thenceforth she instructed the Swami who assisted in the shrine to dispense with the decoration.

To all those who went to her in a mood of repentance or with true spiritual aspiration, she conveyed a little of her vivid sense of the Master's presence. She assured the Master's grace and protection to them, and helped to create in them a conviction of the same. But she claimed no power for herself. To her the Master was everything, and she was his humble instrument. She had obliterated herself in him. So also, never by word or action did she convey the slightest trace of self-assertion with regard to him. She had no idea that her earthly relation with him

gave her any special claim on him. He was the same to all, and devotion was the only condition of realizing his presence.

Closely allied to this self-dedication to the Master was another group of qualities which produced in her an utter absence of the ego. In every great spiritual personage there is an inward consciousness of his power, accompanied always by an unaffected feeling of humility. The Holy Mother was a unique combination of these. There were moments when, under the influence of higher moods or by way of confiding some secret to a devoted disciple, she would speak of her higher nature and of her divinity. In such moments she would compare herself to Lakshmi, the divine consort of Narayana, speak of herself as the Mother of all beings, or admit her capacity to confer liberation on any one. But very often, as soon as such statements came out of her mouth, she would change the topic and try to give the impression that they were slips of the tongue. For, unlike ordinary people, who want to appear much bigger than what they are, her tendency was always to hide her own greatness and appear as a common person. When anybody spoke of her, in her presence, as a divine being, she would at once stop such flattering words and say with the utmost sincerity that she was what she was, only because the Master had given her shelter at his feet. The veil with which she always hid her face in public seemed to be symbolic of this more profound veil of modesty with which she loved

to hide her own towering greatness. It was for this reason that Sri Ramakrishna in fun likened her to a cat that loved to hide its real colour with ashes.

As in spiritual gifts, so was she great in her intellectual qualities. Though uneducated in the modern sense, she was the heir to a great culture by both birth and training, and her extensive travels, varied contacts and experience in administration, both spiritual and secular, endowed her with a broad outlook, refined manners and penetrating intelligence. Thus the stateliness of her courtesy and the openness of her mind were almost as wonderful as her sainthood. Sister Nivedita observed in her an 'instant power to penetrate a new religious feeling or idea', which she must have cultivated by her contact with Sri Ramakrishna. When Easter music was sung before her by the Sister and another Western devotee, she evinced swift comprehension and deep sympathy with those resurrection-hymns, unimpeded by any foreignness or unfamiliarity in them. Again when the same disciples described a European wedding to her, she was exceedingly delighted on hearing the marriage vow, "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health—till death us do part", and characterized them as "Dharmic words, righteous words!"

Her intelligence also was equally remarkable. She could grasp complicated situations with the utmost ease and arrive at sound judgments with extreme

swiftness. An example of this has already been seen in the way in which she responded when the Master tested her by asking her to accept the ten thousand rupees offered by the devotee, Lakshminarain. The following incident furnishes another example. One day when the Master was going to a religious festival at Panihati, a few miles from Dakshineswar, with some devotees, the Master inquired through Yogin-Ma if the Holy Mother desired to accompany, adding that she might come if she liked. At once she understood that he had some reservation in his mind and did not join the party. Later on the Master spoke highly of her intelligence in having divined his thought; for he feared that if light-hearted people saw them together on the scene of the festival, they would sarcastically remark, "Look there, the 'Hamsa' and the 'Hamsi (female swan)' are going."

In later days a disciple who was conducting a charitable dispensary complained to her, "Even people with means come to our dispensary for medicine, though it is meant only for the poor. Should we give medicine to those who have resources?" After a minute's reflection she replied, "My child, all are poor in this part of the country. If, even after knowing the object of your dispensary, people go there begging for medicine, you should supply it, provided you have the resources. Any one who begs is poor."

Once the head of the Koalpara Ashram complained to the Holy Mother that he no longer had control

over his workers because they had learnt to think for themselves, and moreover, when they went to her or to Swami Saradananda, they received every attention and nice food. And he requested her to send them back to him with proper instruction. At this she replied, " How foolishly you talk ! Our essential point is love. It is through love alone that the spiritual family of Sri Ramakrishna has grown and developed. Besides, I am their mother. So how could you criticize in my presence the way in which they were fed and clothed ? Alas, how much did I weep and pray to the Master for my children ! That is why you find everywhere Ashrams and monasteries through his blessings. After the passing away of the Master his disciples renounced the world, found a temporary shelter and for a few days lived together. Then one by one they went out independently and began to roam hither and thither. That made me very sad. I prayed to the Master, saying, ' O Lord, you have been embodied in human form, and you spent the period of your earthly existence with a few disciples. Now has everything ended with your passing away ? In that case, what need was there for your embodiment entailing so much suffering ? I have seen in Brindavan and Banaras so many holy men living on alms and having the shades of trees for shelter. There is no lack of Sadhus (holy men) of that type. I cannot bear to see my children, who have renounced all for your sake, wandering about for a morsel of food. It is my prayer, O Lord, that

those who give up the world for your sake may not suffer for want of simple food and coarse clothing. It is also my prayer that my children should live together, clinging to you and your teachings, and people afflicted with the sufferings of the world should come to them and get peace of mind by hearing from them your words. That is why you incarnated yourself in a human form. My mind becomes restless, seeing my children roam about here and there." This remarkable reply shows what an insight she had into the secret of administering the monastic organization of Sri Ramakrishna, and what important part she played in its formation quite unknown to others. Many more such instances of her intelligence will be found in the 'Conversations' forming the second part of this book.

She had also a very large reserve of courage and resourcefulness, which no one would at first credit her with. Her general bashfulness and motherly tenderness hid these qualities of hers, and it was only when critical situations in life faced her that she would allow this side of her nature to show itself. These qualities became manifest in a remarkable manner in connection with the 'robber father' episode.[1] To cite another instance: Once when she was staying at Jayrambati, Girish Chandra Ghosh went to see her with the intention of taking Sannyasa with her consent, but the Mother, in very mild terms, refused him permission. Girish, however,

[1] See pp. 97 et seqq.

would not accept the verdict so easily. He began to argue his case vehemently for about half an hour, and as he was a man of great mental powers and violent emotions, his pleadings were likely to demolish the resolution of any ordinary person. But the Holy Mother, in spite of all her apparent mildness, had the nerve to stand them and stick to her conviction.

Another incident of the same type occurred in connection with a mishap that befell Swami Vivekananda. While travelling in Kashmir the Swami was cursed by a Mohammedan fakir who was displeased with him, because a disciple of his had contracted an admiration for the Swami. The curse had its effect. The Swami felt very much mortified at this, especially thinking that Sri Ramakrishna could not protect him from a fakir's black magic. When he next met the Holy Mother, the Swami told her about these happenings. He was in a fit of pique, and as he represented his grievance against the Master on this account, his face flushed, and he became very excited and vehement. The Holy Mother, however, did not lose her presence of mind. She calmly consoled him, saying, " Well, my child, we read that even Sankaracharya suffered from the effects of a similar curse. It is all the same whether the ailment occurs to your body or to that of the Master. Moreover, the Master did not come to destroy anything; he came only to fulfil. He had respect for all forms of knowledge, and believed even in omens."

The most remarkable manifestation of her courage and presence of mind, however, took place during her Kamarpukur days, when she was attacked by a devotee of the Master named Harish who had turned insane. To describe the incident in her own words: "Harish was then staying at Kamarpukur for a few days. One day, when I was entering the house after visiting a neighbour, he began to chase me. He was then in a distracted state of mind. He had lost his senses on account of his wife. There was then no one else in the house. I did not know where to go and ran quickly behind the barn. He would not, however, leave me. I ran and ran round it seven times till I got exhausted. Then my true self came out. I threw him to the ground, pressed my knee on his chest, drew out his tongue and slapped him hard on the cheeks until my fingers became red with slapping. He began to gasp for breath."[1] Thus her mild and motherly personality had unsuspected potentialities within it.

The Holy Mother was thus endowed with diverse qualities of head and heart which would have made one great in any situation. Her greatness, however, consisted not so much in being so gifted, which many others, too, could be, but in keeping herself above

[1] This event is sometimes given a supernatural interpretation. Whatever that be, the fact is that she defended herself in a very dangerous situation with remarkable presence of mind. Thus her conception of motherliness and womanly modesty did not exclude the cultivation of resourcefulness and power of self-defence by women. This is an object-lesson to modern Indian women in their present state of utter weakness.

the vanity attendant on it. Besides, she was being literally worshipped by hundreds as a veritable embodiment of divinity, and many distinguished monks and citizens of Calcutta were at her beck and call. All the great Sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna held her in reverence. They were all men of high culture and spiritual attainments. Yet when they were to take any decisive step in their life, or in the management of affairs, they considered the Holy Mother's opinion to be of the highest importance. Even Swami Vivekananda decided on his visit to the West only after he had ascertained her view. Swami Premananda would regard a word from her as a divine command and obey it implicitly. It was noticed that when Swami Brahmananda went to her, his frame would shiver with a high spiritual emotion.

Even Sannyasins who had no connection with the Ramakrishna Order and were utter strangers to her showed the highest reverence to the Holy Mother. Once a Dandi Sannyasin came to pay his respects to her. Now, Dandi Sannyasins are generally very orthodox. Excepting to their Gurus and men of their own rank, they do not show special regard to any other, much less to a woman. But this man, probably hailing from Western India, had come to Calcutta only to meet the Holy Mother. From some scriptural discussions he had at the Udbodhan Office, it also turned out that he was an erudite scholar who could speak fluently in Sanskrit and had a thorough

grasp of the Vedanta and other systems of philosophy. When he was taken to the Mother's presence, he approached her with great fervour to make prostrations. But she, with her characteristic humility and regard for Sannyasins, felt much embarrassed and requested him not to do so. In spite of it he prostrated himself before her, recited verses from the Saptasati in praise of her with great devotion, and prayed for her blessing here and hereafter. The Mother then asked a disciple to give some mangoes to the Sannyasin. Only three mangoes could be found in the store, and these were presented to him. When the Sannyasin had left her presence, she asked the disciple to search for more ripe mangoes as she wanted to give him more. The disciple got one more and took it to him. As he handed it over to him, he was astonished to hear the Sannyasin remark with great delight, "Oh, I am very glad to receive this. At first when the Mother gave me three mangoes, I thought she gave me only the Trivargas—the three-fold ends of Dharma (virtue), Artha (wealth) and Kama (desire). Now I find she has given me also the fourth end—Moksha (liberation)."

But no amount of honour, praise, or worship elated her in the least. She was hardly conscious that all this was being done to her. To her spiritualized vision, all that was hers, or was due to her, went to the glorification of the Master and not of herself. Hence she always remained the innocent village

maiden that she was when she tramped her way from Jayrambati to Calcutta—simple, unostentatious, guileless and ever ready to serve. But it must be noted that hers was no affected simplicity. For behind her virtues there was no trace of the ego. Just as a perfume manifests its fragrance and a full-blown lotus its beauty without any conscious effort on their part, so did all her virtues, including her very simplicity, manifest themselves spontaneously.

To sum up, the three main strands that enter into the complex make-up of her personality are her motherliness, her absorption in the Master, and her artless simplicity which overshadowed her many gifts of both head and heart.

No picture of the Holy Mother's personality can be complete without a brief account of her daily routine and habits. Whether she was at the Udbodhan Office or at Jayrambati, she invariably got up at 3 a.m., just as she used to do in her Dakshineswar days. As the first auspicious sight for the day, she would have a look at the Master's photo in the shrine, which was also her living room wherever she was; for she never liked to be separated from him. She then prayed to the Master for leave to attend to her daily duties, and sat in her bed telling beads till about 6 o'clock when she woke up the Master and made the first offering. After this, if she were at Jayrambati, she would, as the mistress of the house, busy herself with cleaning the rooms and cutting vegetables for the day's cooking. Devotees

6. THE UDBODHAN OFFICE

noticed that she appeared specially affectionate and gracious as she sat cutting vegetables and conversing with them on various topics. So long as her health was good, she used also to take part in the more strenuous items of household work like scouring utensils, carrying water from the tank, and husking paddy. The arrangements for worship, such as cutting fruit and collecting flowers, were generally done by her personally, sometimes assisted by her nieces or devotees. Every day she made about a hundred rolls of betel. Between eight and nine she performed the worship and gave initiation to people, if there were any who desired it, and then distributed the offered fruits and sweets among the devotees and members of the house. She was very particular that the worship should be finished by ten at the latest, and she would become impatient if the monastic disciple to whom she entrusted the work at times, caused delay; for it would then be too late for the devotees to take Prasada (consecrated food). After the worship she took her tiffin, which consisted of sugar-candy water and a little of the offerings, if any were left; for whenever she distributed them, she gave away everything without keeping anything for herself. She then went into the kitchen and relieved the cook who would then go to take tiffin and attend to her personal needs. Thus she would herself cook most of the things for the Master's food offering. She had no objection to offer whatever was prepared for the day, but she took special delight in making those

dishes which the Master had particularly liked. The distinctive characteristic of her cooking was that she would use salt, spices and red pepper very sparingly. After 11 o'clock she finished her bath, and by half past twelve made the noon offering to the Master. All the members of the house then sat for food. In her earlier days the Holy Mother would serve food to all the devotees, and herself sit for the meal only after they had finished. As this habit delayed her meal-time considerably, she was later on persuaded to desist from it. She would, therefore, see that the devotees were seated and served, and then herself sit down for the meal. After the devotees got up she would send them her Prasada for which many of them would wait. It was generally a mixture of several things taken from her plate, and sometimes of milk and rice. She then conversed with the devotees for a while, and before 2 o'clock retired for her siesta.[1]

She was supposed to rest till 3 o'clock, after which she woke up the Master at about 4 p.m. Then she sat in a corner of the room doing Japa without rosary and talking with the devotees who went to see her. Towards the evening she came out and sat in the verandah. Sometimes she worked in the kitchen in the evening, too, in order to save the cook from over-work. At dusk, after doing the Aratrika, she took a bit of some offered sweets and reclined on

[1] She cleaned her teeth four times a day with her favourite tooth powder made of burnt cocoanut leaves and tobacco leaves.

her bed in an indrawn mood, perhaps doing Japa. The last offering to the Master came off at 9 p.m., and half an hour later the devotees all sat for supper. At night the Mother took two or three pieces of Luchis, a little curry and a pint of milk. Before eleven she retired for the night.

At Calcutta also her routine of life continued to be almost the same. She used to take her bath a little earlier, for which purpose she went to the Ganges on alternate days, accompanied by Golap-Ma. Her physical work, too, was less, as Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma looked after the household management. Sometimes in later days even the worship, excepting the offering of food, would be entrusted to some monastic disciple. But in spite of relief from regular duties, her life at Calcutta was much more strenuous; for devotees would go to her at all hours of the day for initiation, for getting their doubts cleared, or for unburdening their hearts. Even after 2 p.m., when she rested, quite a number of women devotees would gather round her; for they had to return home by 4 or 4.30 p.m. The Holy Mother would, therefore, talk to them, lying in bed. In the afternoons, men devotees were allowed to see her after half past five, when the women assembled would be asked to retire to an adjoining room. As the men came in to make obeisance to her, the Holy Mother would be seated on the bedstead, her feet resting on the floor, her face veiled, and her whole body covered with a Chaddar (sheet). If any devotee made enquiries

about her health or other matters, she would reply either in low tones or just by the movement of the head or hand. Those who had to ask her any questions waited till the others had gone out. If the devotee was intimately known to the Mother, she would directly answer his questions in a subdued voice. In case he was a stranger or was an elderly person, she would reply indirectly in very low tones, and the disciple attending on her would communicate the reply distinctly to him. On Tuesdays and Saturdays, as well as on special festive occasions, the public at large was allowed to approach her and make obeisance. They were generally very strenuous days for the Holy Mother.

She required very little food and sleep. She went to bed at about 11 p.m. and got up by 3 a.m. Sometimes on moonlit nights she would get up even earlier, thinking that her usual time had come. As mentioned before, she had three meals a day, but her breakfast and supper were very light. Owing to rheumatism, she used curd and cold things of that type very sparingly. Her main condiments consisted of thin soup of black lentil and poppy seeds roasted in a ladle. Among the things she liked were fried vegetables, preparations made of tender leaves of pulses, Sandesh of the less soft variety, and cakes soaked in syrup of sugar. In later days she used to take a kind of greens called Amrul, prescribed by the physicians as a precaution against dysentery. Of all eatables, she had a partiality for mangoes, curiously preferring

those that had a tinge of sourness in them. Once a devotee purchased mangoes without tasting them, and when they were served at the dinner time, all found it impossible to take them. But everyone was surprised to hear the Mother remarking, " Ah ! these are fine mangoes. They are a little sour."

In her dress the Holy Mother was very simple. She draped her body with one long piece of cloth like all Bengali ladies of the old generation. She never used any frock, stitched garments, or foot-wear. Once a devotee presented a fine frock to her, but she used it only twice or thrice and then put it aside. As she was simple and guileless in nature, so was she plain and unsophisticated in food, dress and daily habits.

CHAPTER XVI

MORE PILGRIMAGES

THE Holy Mother undertook several pilgrimages since the one to Brindavan immediately after the Master's passing (1886), described in chapter XI. These stretch over a period of twenty-five years and chronologically relate to different parts of her life.

About the month of April, 1888, she went to Gaya with Swami Advaitananda (Gopal Senior). Sri Ramakrishna had asked her after the demise of his mother to go to Gaya and make funeral offerings in her memory. She took this opportunity to fulfil the Master's wish. On this occasion she also visited Bodh Gaya, the place of Buddha's enlightenment, situated a few miles from Gaya proper. There she saw the well-known Hindu monastery of Bodh Gaya, and the sight she witnessed there evoked a characteristic desire in her motherly heart. To put it in her own words: "I went to see the monastery of Bodh Gaya. It was filled with various articles, and the monks did not suffer for want of funds. After seeing this I often wept before the Master and prayed, 'O Lord, my children (*i.e.* the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna) have no place wherein to

lay their heads. They have very little to eat. They trudge from door to door for a morsel of food. May they have a place like this!' Subsequently the Belur Math was established through the grace of the Master."

Towards the end of the same year (November 1888), the Holy Mother visited the famous temple of Puri with a party including Yogin-Ma, and Swamis Brahmananda, Yogananda and Saradananda. They were accommodated at Puri in a house belonging to Balaram Bose's family. Now, Balaram Bose's brother, Harivallabh Bose, a famous advocate of those days, was a very influential man in those parts, and the priests of Puri held him in great respect. As the Holy Mother and party were his guests, Govinda Singari, one of the prominent priests of the place, wanted to show special honour to her by taking her to the temple of Jagannath in a palanquin. But she told him, "No, Govinda, you lead me to the temple, and I shall go after you just like a humble, destitute beggar woman to see Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe."

As Sri Ramakrishna had not visited the temple of Jagannath in his lifetime, she took his photograph to the temple covered with her cloth and showed it to the image. She stayed for about four months at Puri, often visiting the temple at the time of the morning and evening services, and spending much time in meditation at the shrine of Lakshmi.

Recounting her experience of Jagannath, she said afterwards, "I saw Jagannath seated like a Person of leonine bearing on his precious altar, and I was serving Him as an attendant." Regarding the identity of Jagannath she had a dream in which she felt that the image was really the emblem of Siva seated on the altar made of a lakh of Salagrams (an emblem of Vishnu).[1]

The next time she went on pilgrimage was in 1894, when she visited Banaras and Brindavan for the second time, accompanied by her mother and brothers. Towards the end of November, 1904, she went again to Puri, accompanied by her mother, her mad sister-in-law Surabala, her niece Radhu, and her brother Kali and his family, besides Swami Premananda and several devotees of the Master. During her stay at Puri she got a very painful boil on the leg. It was so painful that she would not allow anyone even to touch it. Swami Premananda, coming to know of it, made an arrangement with a doctor, who was a devotee of hers, to come with a knife and open the boil. The doctor approached her apparently to make prostration, but while doing so he quickly opened the boil. Although

[1] It is to be noted that the Holy Mother's intuition is in many respects in agreement with historical findings. At present the image is considered to be that of Vishnu or Krishna. Many historians are of opinion that this was originally a Buddhist temple, and when the temple fell into the hands of the followers of Sankaracharya, the image was converted into the emblem of Siva, and still later, when the Vaishnavas got control, they converted it into a Vishnu image.

at the moment the intensity of pain caused annoyance in her mind towards the persons concerned in the plot, she was very grateful to them when she felt relief after the operation. Subsequently her health was good, and she could therefore visit all the holy spots at Puri, circumambulate the temple and bathe in the sea twice. She spent two months in joy and peace in the holy city, reputed for its salubrious climate.

On one occasion she also paid a visit to Vishnupur,[1] situated about twenty-eight miles away from Kamarpukur. Vishnupur was once the capital of a flourishing kingdom, and the pious Vaishnava kings of the place had erected many beautiful temples, now mostly lying in ruins. Sri Ramakrishna looked upon this place as very sacred and asked the Holy Mother to visit it, saying, " Vishnupur is ' concealed Brindavan '. You should go and visit the place some day." Her visit to this place was in fulfilment of his command.

In December, 1910, the Holy Mother started for Kothar in the Balasore district of Orissa en route to Rameswaram, the famous place of pilgrimage in the South. She stayed for about two months at Kothar, the headquarters of Balaram Bose's estate in Orissa. There one Devendra Nath Chatterji, postmaster of

[1] This is a station on the Eastern Railway and pilgrims going to Jayrambati and Kamarpukur by the easiest route get down here, go to Kotalpur at a distance of about 20 miles in motor bus, and cover the remaining distance of 8 miles to Jayrambati on foot or by bullock cart.

Kothar—who had once accepted Christianity, and now repenting of his action, wanted to come back to Hinduism—got reconverted with the Holy Mother's approval. After certain purificatory ceremonies, one of the Holy Mother's monastic followers gave him the sacred thread and the Gayatri Mantra, and the next day he was initiated by the Mother herself.

Towards the close of February she started for Rameswaram with a party of eight, and reached Madras, halting on the way at Berhampore for a day. Swami Ramakrishnananda, a disciple of the Master and the founder of the first Ramakrishna Math in South India, accorded her a cordial reception. She stayed in Madras for about a month and gave initiation to several people. Though, for want of a common language, she could not speak freely with the large number of ladies who visited her, yet on account of sympathetic understanding they could make themselves understood to one another. After her return to Calcutta she said to a disciple by way of her reminiscences of Madras, "Many people visited me there. The women of those parts are very educated. They asked me to deliver a lecture. I said to them, 'I do not know how to deliver lectures. If Gourdasi had come, she would have been able to do so.'"

Starting from Madras, with the party strengthened by the inclusion of Swami Ramakrishnananda in it, she halted at Madura for a day and reached Rameswaram by the next night. She spent three days in

that great place of pilgrimage. By the order of the Raja of Ramnad, she was given facilities of worship which are never given to any pilgrim, however exalted his position in life may be. At Rameswaram, unlike in the temples of North India, no one except the officiating priests are allowed to enter the sanctum sanctorum or to touch and worship the image. But by the special order of the Raja of Ramnad, who was a great devotee of Swami Vivekananda, not only the Holy Mother but all the women of her party were allowed to go into the shrine and worship the Siva image for three days.

Recounting her experience of Rameswaram, the Holy Mother said afterwards: "Sasi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) procured for me one hundred and eight bel leaves made of gold to worship Siva at Rameswaram. When informed of my coming, the Raja of Ramnad ordered his officer there to show me his buildings and treasures. He further gave the order that if I liked anything, it should be presented to me. But what did I want there? Unable to come to any decision, I said, 'Sasi has arranged for everything I require.' But unwilling to hurt the feelings of the officer, I added, 'If Radhu wants anything, let her ask for it.' I said to Radhu, 'You may take whatever you need.' Then as diamonds and other precious stones were shown, my heart began to tremble. Eagerly I prayed to the Master, 'O Lord, please see that Radhu does not crave for any of these things.'

Radhu at last said, 'What shall I take ? I do not care for any of these things. I have just lost my pencil. Please buy one for me.' I heaved a sigh of relief. Coming out I bought her a pencil for half an anna from a shop in the street."

After leaving Rameswaram the Holy Mother also visited Bangalore, where a branch of the Ramakrishna Math was already in existence. She was given a very cordial and respectful welcome by Swami Nirmalananda, the President of the local Ashrama. She was accommodated in the Ashram building itself, while a tent was put up in its compound for the rest of the party. One day she sanctified the hillock of rocks at the back of the Ashram by performing Japa on it in the evening. Even without any public announcement large numbers of people came to see her there. Referring to this she said in later days, "What a crowd I met in Bangalore! People began to shower flowers as I got down from the train. Flowers lay high on the road. The message of the Master has spread everywhere; therefore so many people come."

On her way back to Calcutta she halted for a day at Rajahmundry for bath in the holy Godavari, and for a couple of days at Puri. She reached Calcutta on the 11th of April, 1911.

One more pilgrimage she undertook in her lifetime, and that was in November, 1912, to Banaras for the third time. She was accompanied by a large party consisting of a few senior Swamis of the

Ramakrishna Order, some relatives and several devotees. She was accommodated at Lakshmi Nivas, a newly built house belonging to a devotee, very close to the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama.

She stayed this time in the holy city for two months and a half. So she could, on this occasion, visit at leisure all the important temples and other places of interest in and about the city. After making her obeisance to Visvanath and Annapurna, the principal Deities in Banaras, she visited, on the third day of her arrival, the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram, one of the premier philanthropic institutions under the Mission and an important centre of medical relief in the city. After seeing the different wards, she was highly satisfied and made kind enquiries about how it was started and by whom. Finally she expressed her appreciation of the work in these significant words: "The Master is present here, and Mother Lakshmi (Goddess of Prosperity), too, is abiding here in all her glory. . . . The place looks so nice that I should like to stay here permanently." And as soon as she went back to her residence, she sent a sum of ten rupees as her donation for the institution.

As regards the shrines she visited, she said about the Siva images known as Vaidyanath and Tilbhandeswar that they had sprung from the earth and not been made by the hands of men. About the image of Kedarnath she said, "This Kedar and the Kedar in the Himalayas are related to each other. If one

visits this, one really visits the other. This Deity is a very living presence."

One day she went to visit Sarnath, the ruined site of an important centre of Buddhist learning and religious activity in ancient days. On seeing there some Westerners looking at the relics of Buddhism in speechless wonder, she remarked, "These are the people who built this place in a previous incarnation. They are amazed at their own doings."

While returning from Sarnath, the Holy Mother narrowly escaped a very serious accident. On the return trip Swami Brahmananda had exchanged his carriage with that of the Holy Mother. As they proceeded, the horses of the carriage in which the Swami was seated ran amuck, thus upsetting the carriage and causing considerable injury to the Swami. Referring to this incident, the Mother said, "I was to be involved in the accident, but Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) diverted it and made himself the victim of it. Otherwise the consequences would have been disastrous."

The Holy Mother visited two well-known monks in Banaras. One of them belonged to the sect of Nanak and lived on the banks of the Ganges. The other was the celebrated Chameli Puri, who was a junior contemporary of Tota Puri, the preceptor of Sri Ramakrishna, and belonged to the same monastery as he. When Golap-Ma inquired of this monk as to who had been supplying him with food, the monk replied with great force and earnestness, "It is the

Goddess Annapurna who feeds me. Who else would?" The Holy Mother was highly pleased with the answer. Returning home, she said to her disciples, "The face of the old man is constantly in my mind. It is just like that of a child." Next day she sent him some oranges, sweets and a blanket. When asked if she would visit other holy men in the city, she said, "I have seen that holy man (Chameli Puri). What need have I to visit others? And what other holy man is here?"

She returned to Calcutta on the 16th of January, 1913.

CHAPTER XVII

HER LATER LIFE

IT remains now to take a rapid survey of the main incidents of the Holy Mother's life since she began to stay among the devotees in Calcutta from 1888. Her pilgrimages falling in this period, as also the several small incidents of her daily life revealing phases of her character and personality, have already been dealt with, and only a few noteworthy events of her later life remain to be recorded.

On the 12th of November, 1898, the day of the annual Kali Puja, she paid her first visit [1] to the monastery at Belur that was being built by Swami Vivekananda after his return from the West. The buildings were probably nearing completion then, but the installation in the monastic shrine had not yet taken place. It has already been mentioned how the Holy Mother's heart felt very sorry that her monastic children had neither a fixed abode nor sufficient food, and how she prayed to the Master that they might be provided with both. The sight

[1] She had visited the site earlier in the year probably in April, when the construction of the building started.

of the new monastery must, therefore, have gladdened her beyond measure. On the day of her visit, she herself swept and washed a room in the Math and performed the worship, installing her own picture of the Master.

The new buildings of the Math were completed by December, 1898. On the 9th December Swami Vivekananda carried the relics of the Master on his own head to the new Math at Belur, where he installed them and performed worship and Homa for solemnizing the occasion. The new monastery came to be occupied by the monks early next year, and in the October of 1901 Swami Vivekananda had the Durga Puja celebrated on a grand scale at the new Math. The occasion was memorable in the annals of the Math, both because it was the first worship of that type to be done there, and because the Holy Mother was present on all the five days of worship, which was done in her name.

The year 1898 and 1899 were in certain respects years of joy for the Holy Mother, for these marked the construction of the permanent Math building for her monastic children at Belur. But this period was also noted for the sad bereavements she had to suffer in quick succession. As noted before it was towards the middle of 1899 that the youngest and most beloved of her brothers, Abhay Charan, met with premature death, leaving behind tremendous domestic responsibilities for the Holy Mother to shoulder. A little earlier, on the 28th

March of the same year, had passed away Swami Yogananda, one of the most illustrious of Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples and the Holy Mother's attendant and guardian for the past twelve years. His death left the Holy Mother so disconsolate that it affected even her health.

In fact, the Swami, as already mentioned, was among the earliest of her disciples, and had accompanied her to Brindavan and to Kamarpukur. After his return from those places, he subjected himself to austerities at Banaras. In those days he took a vow of possessing no money, and all his time, except two or three hours of sleep, was devoted to meditation. To reduce the time spent on procuring food, he would collect a number of Chapatis by begging once in three or four days, keep them tied up in a cloth, and take a portion of them powdered every day. This rigorousness told upon his delicate health. He got a severe attack of dysentery and had to return to the Math. He was very emaciated, but his face looked healthy and luminous. His eyes, indrawn and reddish in tinge, resembled the 'divine eye' described by Sri Ramakrishna, and in spite of his physical ailments, he remained always witty and jovial. At Calcutta he generally stayed in Balaram Babu's house, as he got better facilities for diet there. Whenever the Holy Mother came to Calcutta, he attended on her. He then stayed in a room at the entrance of her house, did all the outdoor work connected with her establishment, received gifts

from the devotees for her, admitted visitors according to her convenience, and did everything to make her stay comfortable. Even when he was seriously ill, he continued to do this service to the Mother. He passed away prematurely, leaving the Holy Mother to bemoan his death with an intensity of sorrow which few earthly mothers are capable of.[1] She is said to have remarked in her sorrow, "Now one brick has fallen from the building; the others will follow."

In later days the Holy Mother used to speak of him thus: "No one loved me like Yogen. If any one gave him eight annas, he would put it aside, saying, 'Mother may need it for a pilgrimage.' He attended on me constantly. The other disciples of the Master therefore used to tease him for staying among women."

Again the years 1905 and 1906 were rendered unhappy for the Holy Mother by the sad loss of several close relatives and the consequent devolution of more heavy family responsibilities on her. In April 1905 her uncle Nilmadhav who was living under her care in his old age, passed away. She engaged herself unsparingly in nursing this uncle who was very dear to her. Nilmadhav's death was

[1] We may mention here an incident that reveals the depth of the Holy Mother's affection for Swami Yogananda. The Swami had once presented her with a quilt which became worn out after some years. So she at first made arrangement to get it stuffed with new cotton but afterwards desisted from the course, because she thought that it would change the thing presented by her beloved Yogen beyond all recognition. She had the habit of preserving even trifling presents as mementos of loved ones.

followed very shortly by that of a sister-in-law, the wife of her brother Prasanna. The lady, who was staying with the Holy Mother at Jayrambati, had a sudden attack of what looked like cholera. There was no medical aid available in the village and she died in a few hours, attended only by the Holy Mother. She left behind two very young girls, Nalini and Maku, who had thenceforth to be looked after by the Holy Mother. Along with Radhu they became the Holy Mother's charge, and we find them always as members of her household.

Crowning all these bereavements came the death of her own dear mother, Syamasundari Devi, endearingly called 'grandmother' by devotees. Aged about seventy, she had seen all the ups and downs of life, and had played her part heroically even when faced with utter poverty and destitution. She had lived to see her daughter Sarada rising in people's estimation, from the wife of an eccentric man to a goddess worshipped by people occupying the highest position in life. From the head of an unknown village family, she (Syamasundari) was now the mistress of what she called 'a household of God and godly people', and the 'grandmother' of the innumerable spiritual children of her divine daughter. Simple, diligent, hardworking and kindly, she engaged herself all through day in spite of age, in every kind of household work—tending cattle, feeding labourers, husking paddy and entertaining the many devotees who either visited, or camped

in, their house to meet the Holy Mother. Even on the last day of her life, some time in February, 1906, she had helped in husking paddy and had made some purchases for the house. After that she felt very weak, lay down in the veranda, and called out: "I am dying, I feel my head reeling." All the occupants of the house, including the Holy Mother, hurried to her side. As a last sacrament the Holy Mother gave her the sacred waters of the Ganges to drink, and performed Japa touching her head and chest. The lady quietly passed away, leaving the Holy Mother and a host of grandchildren, both spiritual and secular, to bemoan her death. Swami Saradananda made very grand arrangements for her funeral obsequies.

In 1907 the Holy Mother attended the Durga Puja celebration held at the house of Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great Bengali dramatist and a prominent householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. She was then in bad health owing to malaria, and it was only the earnestness of the great devotee Girish and his sister that brought her from Jayrambati to Calcutta to attend the festival. Ever since his mystic experiences connected with the Holy Mother's spiritual identity, Girish looked upon her as the veritable embodiment of the Mother of the universe, and the prospect of her presence at his worship therefore filled him with ecstatic joy. The Mother was accommodated at Balaram Babu's house and visited Girish's place to attend worship. The

first two days of the ceremony passed smoothly. The worship in fact took a twofold form. While the worship of the image was going on, streams of devotees who went to see her at her residence and at the place of Girish Ghosh, continuously offered flowers for long hours at the feet of the living Mother in the shape of the Holy Mother. The strain of the first two days' experiences told upon her declining health, and she had to announce her incapacity to attend on the third day which was the most important day of worship. This was a terribly depressing news for Girish and he felt that without the Holy Mother's presence, the worship of the Goddess which he had organized with great effort and at great expense, would be nothing more than a pageantry. When the clouds of disappointment were thus gathering in the devotee's mind, the Holy Mother, by divine intuition as it were, changed her mind and, just when the most auspicious moment of the worship was to begin, announced herself at the entrance of Girish's house. The news of the Holy Mother's arrival revived the drooping spirit of devotees and poured new enthusiasm and fervour into their hearts. On the third day also the Mother received the flower offerings of her innumerable devotees, including the actors and actresses of the theatre conducted by Girish Chandra Ghosh.

The same scenes of spiritual fervour and enthusiasm as on the occasion described above, were

witnessed whenever the Holy Mother graced the Durga Puja celebrations held at the Belur Math by her presence. To attend the Puja at Belur in 1912, she camped there for about a week. When she arrived at the gate of the Math at the close of the Bodhan ceremony (awakening of the Deity), the monks and devotees headed by the great Swami Premananda unhorsed the carriage and drew it through the Math grounds. On successive days hundreds of devotees made flower offerings at her feet. Swami Brahmananda worshipped her with one hundred and eight full-blown lotuses, and her devotee and disciple, Dr. Kanjilal, danced before the image of the Deity with gestures and postures like a mischievous imp, to entertain the Divine Mother, as it were. She was again present at the worship of Durga held in 1916. We get an impression of the exaltation she created by her presence, in the following extract from a letter of Swami Shivananda: "Owing to the presence of the blessed Holy Mother amongst us, this year's Puja has been a direct worship of the Divine Mother unlike the usual one through the consecrated image. Although there was continuous rain and wind on all the three days, no part of the celebration suffered, thanks to the Mother's grace. We were astonished to note how even the rain stopped whenever it was time for devotees to take Prasad (consecrated food), sitting in the unprotected courtyard. Afterwards we learnt from Yogin-Ma that whenever rain

seemed imminent at about the meal time, the Holy Mother would sit down to make Japa of Durga's holy name, praying, 'Mother, save us. How can these devotees take Thy holy Prasad in this pouring rain!' And Mother Durga did, indeed, save us."

The 23rd of May, 1909, was an important date in the Holy Mother's life. For that was the day on which she stepped into her newly built Calcutta residence, generally known as the Udbodhan Office. Ever since she began to visit Calcutta in 1888, she was being accommodated either in the houses of devotees or in rented buildings. Evidently this was inconvenient both to herself and to those who went to see her in increasing numbers. Besides, with the passing of years her entourage of dependent relatives, devotee companions and disciple attendants increased in number, making it too inconvenient and expensive for any individual devotee to accommodate. Taking all this into consideration, Swami Saradananda, who had taken up the Holy Mother's charge some time after Swami Yogananda's demise, raised a loan and constructed this new building as the Holy Mother's Calcutta house. It is also called the Udbodhan Office, because the *Udbodhan*, the Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Movement, is being published from there since its opening. For the remaining eleven years of her life, the Holy Mother lived in this house whenever she was in Calcutta. The northern hall on the second storey of it formed

her living room as well as the shrine. She lived[1] in this house along with a few of her inseparable relatives, her monastic followers and some of Sri Ramakrishna's great disciples who formed her attendants and companions.

During this long period of eleven years, the Holy Mother's time was divided between her Calcutta residence and her rural home. It was the period during which the vast majority of her disciples met her and received her blessings. It was also the period when she found herself burdened with the responsibilities of several indigent relatives. The devotees found in her a veritable goddess and went to serve her and receive her benediction, while the relatives, as we have already seen, surrounded her either because they were helpless in the world

[1] Whenever the Holy Mother lived in Calcutta at the Udbodhan Office, Swami Saradananda met all her expenses. At Jayrambati she herself met the expenses of her household, although Swami Saradananda used to send her remittances now and then when she was in need. Her income consisted of the gifts made by disciples at the time of initiation, and of the small contributions made by her intimate devotees. Most of her disciples being students and middle class men, their contribution was neither large nor very steady, so much so that when Mrs. Ole Bull, a great American devotee of Swami Vivekananda, began to send her a regular donation of twenty-five rupees a month, she felt it as a substantial addition to her financial resources. In later days, whenever she stayed at Jayrambati, she had to spend nothing less than rupees one hundred a month. As a rule very little of this amount was spent on herself personally. It was used mainly for the entertainment of devotee-visitors, whose number came to ten or fifteen at times, for the maintenance of her dependents like Radhu and her mother, and for helping her indigent relatives and co-villagers. Especially in her last years, her expenses increased very much owing to the protracted illness of Radhu.

without her protection or because they could utilize her presence for deriving financial advantages. In the chapters depicting her dealing with both these groups of people, it has been shown how the demands of these conflicting relationships lost their disharmony under the sanctifying influence of her sense of universal motherhood.

Her life in her village home was a strenuous one. She had to shoulder the main responsibilities of the household herself, and that was rendered onerous because it consisted not only of her inseparable relatives, but also of several others who camped in her village home. In Calcutta her movements were very restricted and she was inaccessible to men devotees except at fixed times. In the village, however, she moved in and out of the house very freely, and devotees could see her almost always. So, many devotees flocked to Jayrambati, and the Holy Mother used to feed and accommodate them in her own house. Being aware of the higher standards of comforts accustomed to by her Calcutta visitors, she strove her best to provide them with every possible amenity, though it often meant very heavy physical strain on her. She went about collecting milk and vegetables for them, often cooked special dishes to feed them, and attended on those that happened to fall ill. As the welcome she gave to these spiritual children was whole-hearted and spontaneous, she went through all this strenuous experience with the utmost joy and satisfaction, although the devotees

themselves felt embarrassed at the trouble they were giving her unknowingly. It was indeed a sad day for her when the house was without any devotee-visitor, and she considered such days as days spent in vain.

Among the devotees and disciples who served the Mother in her village home, special mention has to be made of the inmates of the Koalpara Ashrama. Koalpara was a village on the way from Jayrambati to Vishnupur, the railway station from which one has to take train to Calcutta. The Ashrama practically sprang into existence as a midway house for the Holy Mother to halt on her way to and from Jayrambati, and the inmates of that Ashrama looked upon themselves as an outpost to guard and serve the Mother in her village home. Often the young Brahmacharins did a lot of manual labour in the Mother's household whenever there was construction work or a religious festival there. They procured vegetables for her, ran errands, and were always at her beck and call. The Mother too had a very soft corner in her heart for them. She did her best to give a spiritual turn to the life of these young men who were at that time moved powerfully by the nationalist movement. She called Koalpara her 'parlour', and had a cottage built for her in the Ashrama premises. She also spent some days in that cottage when Radhu's health required a retreat in an absolutely quiet place.

Besides the visiting disciples and devotees, the Mother's household in her village home consisted

mostly of her relatives—brothers, their wives, nephews, nieces and their husbands, all of whom looked upon her from an angle of vision totally different from that of the devotees. The brothers teased her with their quarrels for money, the nieces worried her with their freaks and eccentricities, and their husbands taxed her with their demands for ceremonious attention which their relationship as sons-in-law in the family entitled them to. Drawing attention to this marked contrast between the attitudes and behaviour of these groups, the Mother once remarked: "See, I have many children (disciples). When they come, one can serve them food in hand or on leaves, as one finds convenient. But should any of them (the relatives and the sons-in-law) come, what a number of cups and dishes one will have to get! If you don't, there will be bitter complaints."

The peace of her village home was in these days occasionally disturbed by another type of people. These were officers of the Police Department who were on the look out everywhere for people implicated in the nationalist (Swadeshi) movement. Those were days when the political life of Bengal was lashed into violent activity owing to the partition of the province. An important feature of this phase of the national movement was the boycott of foreign goods, especially cloth, and vigorous propaganda for Swadeshi or indigenous goods. The wearing of indigenous cloth thus became a symbol

of political agitation in the eye of the police. A strict watch was therefore kept on all sympathizers of the movement. Among the Mother's disciples there were several who were under internment for being deeply implicated in the movement. The frequent visits of such persons made the Mother's place suspect in the eye of the police. Very often police parties began to visit the house, causing great unpleasantness to her, and take note of men and things there. She was however relieved of much of this trouble after a high police officer was brought to her house to study the real state of affairs. Thenceforth the police vigilance was slackened into mere noting of names of persons who came to and went from the place.

The quietness, the freedom and the unconventionality of village life was very much to the Mother's liking, and she often spent there long periods, sometimes extending over a year. But ill health arising from the strain of household work and the malarial tendencies of rural Bengal, as also the necessity of expert medical consultation for Radhu's frequent ailments, often forced her to migrate to Calcutta and spend long periods at the Udbodhan Office, the city residence built for her by Swami Saradananda. In Calcutta her movements were considerably restricted, but she was free from financial responsibilities and the burden of domestic duties. Swami Saradananda shouldered the former and Golap-Ma the latter. Nonetheless her days

were busily occupied with the service of the Master and the reception of devotees. On all days and at all times she was accessible to women devotees, and there was a constant stream of them, some seeking help and inspiration in spiritual life, others with prayers for attainment of worldly goods, and still others for confessions and consolations to relieve their distressed hearts. Men devotees too were admitted, but only at particular times of the day, and they probably had not the same freedom of association with the Mother in Calcutta as in her village home. That was why many of the intimate men devotees flocked in large numbers to Jayrambati in spite of the difficulties of journey and stay.

Though the rural surroundings of Jayrambati were more to her liking, life in Calcutta had its own attraction for her. Calcutta offered her the opportunity of living with some of her old associates—the great monastic disciples and women devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, some of whom took upon themselves the duty of being her attendants and companions whenever she was in Calcutta. A life of the Holy Mother will be incomplete without at least a brief account of these attendants and companions who played so important a part in her life. Frequent references have been made to them in the course of this narrative, and one of them, Swami Yogananda, the great monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who attended on the Holy Mother for

7. SWAMI YOGANANDA
(JOGINDRA)

8. SWAMI SARADANANDA

twelve years, has already been dealt with. Among the other disciples of the Master, Swami Adbhutananda, known also as Latu, had served her in earlier days, and in later times Swami Trigunatita took for a short period the place left vacant by Swami Yogananda. After that the responsibility of the Holy Mother was taken up by Swami Saradananda, otherwise known as Sarat Maharaj, who played a very important part in her life.

He was one of the twelve young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who left their home and studies with a view to serving their great Master in his last illness. After Sri Ramakrishna's demise, he, like his fellow-disciples, devoted himself to severe austerities. Swami Vivekananda had great confidence in him for his deep spirituality, his intellectual powers and his administrative capacity. So he was first sent as the Swami's successor to preach the Vedanta in England and America (1895), and a few years later (1898) he was recalled and appointed Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, a position which he retained till the end.

Some time after Swami Yogananda's passing away, he took up the responsibility of looking after the Holy Mother, besides attending to his onerous duties as the Secretary. The work of attending on the Holy Mother was not a light one. As she herself put it, "I shall have no difficulty so long as Sarat lives. I do not see anybody else who can shoulder my burden." For it involved a good deal of expense,

besides looking after the eccentric and infirm relatives of the Holy Mother, for whom she had a responsibility. In spite of many difficulties, the Swami discharged this task so much to the satisfaction of the Holy Mother that he won her wholehearted love and confidence. If anyone spoke of her going to Calcutta when the Swami was not there, she would say, "There can be no question of my going to Calcutta when Sarat is not there. To whom shall I go? Suppose I am in Calcutta and Sarat says that he wants to go elsewhere for a few days. Then I tell him, 'Wait a little, my child. First of all let me leave this place, and then you may go.'" She used to speak of him as her Vasuki, the mythical snake, who protected her with a thousand hoods. In her last days she was heard to remark, "I am tired of this life. I shall now depart, taking Sarat in my arms and carrying him wherever I go." It is said that the Swami wept like a child on hearing this.

The Swami's devotion to the Holy Mother found expression in his reverential attitude towards all womankind, and in his active interest in the working and progress of the Nivedita Girls' School. Besides, it has found embodiment in architectural form as the Udbodhan Office, which he constructed for the Holy Mother's residence at Calcutta,[1] and later on as the Holy Mother's

[1] He spent his days in a front room of this house as the 'Mother's gate-keeper'.

temple at Jayrambati, which he built after her passing away. His devotion has also received literary commemoration in his book *Mother Worship in India*, which he has dedicated to the Holy Mother with the noble and significant words, "By whose gracious look the author has been able to realize the revelation of Divine Motherhood in every female form,—to the lotus feet of her, this work is dedicated in all humility and devotion."

In addition to these Sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the great women disciples of the Master also formed the lifelong companions of the Holy Mother. There were several of them—Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma, Lakshmi Devi and Gauri-Ma being the most important. All of them except the last were widows, and they all lived a holy life of contemplation and service.

Of these, Golap-Ma was the closest of the Holy Mother's companions, and acted also as something of a *gendarme* to her in her later days. She was a widow belonging to a poor but aristocratic Brahmin family. She took shelter at the feet of the Master when she was stricken with grief owing to the death of her only daughter who was married into a rich family. Ever since, she was intimate with the Holy Mother, and had constantly stayed with her except for brief periods, safeguarding her interests in all matters and rendering devoted and loving service to her in her daily life. Referring to her, the Master

had said to the Holy Mother, "Take care of this Brahmin woman. She will stay with you all along." True to this, she followed the Holy Mother like a shadow for full thirty-six years after the Master's passing away. As we have seen, she was with the Holy Mother during most of her pilgrimages and often formed one of her escort party when she went to visit any place. Whenever the Mother was at Calcutta, Golap-Ma invariably stayed with her, looked after the internal management of her household, and often protected her from the importunities of indiscreet devotees. As the Holy Mother did not generally speak directly with men devotees, it was Golap-Ma who often conveyed her blessings to them or interpreted what she said in very low tones by way of reply to their questions. She helped the Mother to get in and out of a carriage, and whenever the Mother had to go on foot, she would walk only behind Golap-Ma. When she went on a visit to any devotee's house, she would invariably take Golap-Ma with her, saying, "Unless she goes, how can I go? I feel bold in her company."

Golap-Ma was also a woman of great spiritual attainments. She used to spend several hours in the morning and evening in meditation. The Holy Mother always spoke highly of the purity of her mind, and considered her as having attained perfection in Japa. She was free from any exaggerated feminine shyness, and therefore eminently fit to play the part of an intermediary between the Holy

9. YOGIN-MA

10. GOLAP-MA

Mother and the devotees. Being very outspoken by nature, she would speak the plain truth to anybody's face. As a result, though she looked upon the Holy Mother with great reverence, she would not hesitate to take even her to task whenever any occasion arose. The Mother often corrected her, telling her that in the name of truth she was losing sensitiveness to others' feelings, and that sometimes it would be no sin not to speak an unpleasant truth.

But everyone knew that in spite of her curt speech and impulsive nature, Golap-Ma had a very sound and loving heart. Indeed, her spirit of service was wonderful. When she found dirt anywhere on the bathing ghat, she would remove it with rags and wash the place with water. Once at Brindavan she found that somebody's child had dirtied the precincts of the temple. As she found no one coming forward to clean the spot, she did the work herself, whereupon some of the assembled devotees began to say that it must have been done by her child. They were, however, silenced by others who pointed out that she was a holy woman and had no child of her own.

She used to receive a small allowance from her daughter's son, half of which she would pay at the Udbodhan Office for her maintenance and the remaining half, in helping indigent people. She used to induce some of the Mother's doctor devotees to visit the homes of poor patients free of charge. Her daily life at the Udbodhan Office was one of tireless

service. She supervised all departments of the household, distributed Prasada among the devotees, and in various ways served the monks like a mother. She passed away in December, 1924, about four years after the Holy Mother's demise.

Yogin-Ma (Yogendra Mohini Biswas) was another intimate companion of the Holy Mother. She, as also Golap-Ma, had spent so much time in her company from early days that the Holy Mother used to say, "Yogin and Golap know all about every phase of my life." Yogin-Ma was the most impressive among the Mother's companions and was highly spiritual too. Sri Ramakrishna used to speak of her, "Among women, Yogin is the Jnani"; and also "She is not an ordinary flower bud that opens in a short time. She is a thousand-petalled lotus which will open only in course of time." Her later life fully corroborated this estimate. While she was in Brindavan with the Holy Mother, she often experienced Samadhi. One day she was found in that state at the temple of Lala Babu, and could not be roused from it even when the priest was about to close the temple at night. Later, speaking about her experience, she said, "In that state I felt that the world did not exist." Referring to an experience of another period of her life, she said, "I passed through a stage in which I saw my Ishtam (chosen deity) in all objects around. This lasted for three days."

She was the wife of a rich Zemindar, but owing to certain unhappy domestic circumstances she generally lived in her paternal home from her early days. She was taken to the Master by Balaram Bose, and since then became the most confidential friend of the Holy Mother, whose equal she was in age. In her days at Dakshineswar the Holy Mother used to have her hair braided by Yogin-Ma, and so much did she like her braiding that she would not disturb it even at the time of bathing, until Yogin-Ma visited her a week after. We have already seen how she accompanied the Holy Mother during many of her pilgrimages. After the Holy Mother began to live in Calcutta, she would contribute her share in the management and upkeep of her household. She stayed in her own house at Baghbazar, where she had to look after her old mother and her grandchildren. But she would visit the Holy Mother in the morning, dress vegetables for the day's cooking, then return home, cook for her old mother, and again go to the Holy Mother and serve her in all possible ways till night.

Though Yogin-Ma continued to stay in her home, she had performed the Purnabhisheka of the Tantras, as well as the Viraja Homa of the Vedas, both indicative of one's having renounced the worldly life. Every day, after bath in the Ganges, she spent a couple of hours at the bathing ghat of the holy river, doing Japa with perfect absorption, irrespective of the inclemencies of weather. She was well versed in ceremonial worship, but to this she added

a temperament full of ecstatic devotion. She was never seen to waste her time, all her leisure being devoted to the study of the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata*, the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and books on the Master. Her memory was keen, and she could narrate the Puranic stories with great accuracy and repeat verbatim passages from the *Chaitanya Charitamrita*. She passed away at the age of seventy-three, in 1924, the same year as Golap-Ma.

Still another woman disciple of the Master who lived in close association with the Holy Mother, was Gauri-Ma. Besides being deeply spiritual, she possessed great learning, intrepidity and organizing power. She had felt the call of the higher life from her very girlhood and had therefore resisted all the attempts of her relatives to get her married. Having come into contact with Sri Ramakrishna early in life, she renounced hearth and home and is reported to have performed austerities in the Himalayas as a Sannyasini. After 1882 she stayed mostly at the Nahabat with the Holy Mother, serving her and the Master to the best of her capacity. Sri Ramakrishna, who had full appreciation of her capacities, often sent her to disseminate religious ideas among women, and commissioned her to devote her life to the uplift of women. So, after the Master's passing, she spent some years in hard austerities at Brindavan, and then started an educational institution for girls, which she named Sri Saradeswari Ashrama and School, as a

token of her reverence for the Holy Mother. This institution, at present situated at 26 Maharani Hemanta Kumari Street, Calcutta, is one of the noted women's educational institutions in that city. Besides imparting general education to girls, it gives them a sound home training based on the great Hindu ideals of purity, service and devotion. It is run by a band of capable women who have dedicated their lives to asceticism and service under the inspiring influence of Gauri-Ma.

The relationship between Gauri-Ma and the Holy Mother was characterized by deep love and regard for each other. Once Gauri-Ma expressed her unbounded reverence for the Holy Mother in the following terms: "Sri Sarada Devi was not only the Master's partner in his life-work but also the object wherein he worshipped the Cosmic Mother. The worship of one's own wife as the Divine Mother is indeed a phenomenon which no other age had witnessed. . . People have not yet been able to know the Holy Mother. A full appreciation of the significance of her life is bound to have a liberalizing influence upon the whole world."

Her deep regard for the Holy Mother found expression once on the occasion of the Durga Puja. She was reading the *Chandi* (*Saptasati*) in the presence of the Holy Mother on all the days of the worship. On the final day she worshipped the Mother with a hundred and eight crimson lotuses and said, "Mother, having read the *Chandi* (the book on the

Divine Mother) in the living presence of Chandi (the Divine Mother) Herself, I complete today my vow of the study of this great book. Hereafter the study of it during the Durga Puja will not be compulsory for me, but will be determined by your will."

The Holy Mother on her part loved Gauri-Ma like a daughter, and the deep reverence that the latter had for her was not therefore without frequent exchange of fun between them. She used to call her endearingly as Gaurdasi. There were occasions when the Holy Mother nursed Gauri-Ma all through night in her illness. Though she herself was not learned in the Scriptures, the Holy Mother admired Gauri-Ma's erudition and many-sided talents. Once she remarked, "A great soul is always a rarity, having hardly any parallel. Gaurdasi is one such rare soul." Again, when, during her visit to Madras, she was requested by the ladies there to deliver a speech, she said, "I cannot deliver public speeches. Had Gaurdasi come with me, she would have delivered one."

In all her public activities Gauri-Ma had the hearty approval and encouragement of the Holy Mother. She started her educational institution with the Holy Mother's blessings, and the latter often visited it and expressed her warm approval of the lines on which it was run. After the starting of the Ashrama and School, Gauri-Ma could not live with the Holy Mother as before, since she had to attend to the work connected with it. Yet she visited her

11. LAKSHMI-DIDI

12. GAURI-MA

frequently and brought many of her students and devotees to her for initiation.[1]

The Holy Mother's close association with these women companions, some of whom were so unlike her in habits and disposition, brings us to the question as to what her ideal of womanhood was. For we

[1] There were also several others among the Master's women devotees who moved closely with the Holy Mother. Important among them was Lakshmi-Didi (Sister Lakshmi), the niece of Sri Ramakrishna, whose name has been frequently mentioned in this narrative. She was a virgin widow, junior to the Holy Mother in age. She used to stay with her for long periods in the Nahabat in her Dakshineswar days, sharing her work and undergoing spiritual practices with her. In later days, after the Holy Mother began to live in Calcutta, she mostly stayed with her relatives at Dakshineswar or at her village or in places of pilgrimage. She was a talented conversationalist, and could hold her devotees spell-bound by her thrilling narration of the incidents of Sri Ramakrishna's life and her realistic imitation of his manners and speech. She could also sing devotional songs and perform devotional dances with great charm, and in later days she often used to pass into ecstasy while doing so. She was noted for her prodigious memory and her mastery of Indian mythology. In the last period of her life she gave initiation to many disciples. She passed away at Puri, where she spent most of her time towards the end of her life.

Gopaler-Ma ('mother of Gopal') was another ascetic woman who was closely associated with the Holy Mother. She was a child-widow and senior to the Holy Mother by many years. She worshipped Gopala or child Krishna as her chosen deity, and as we learn from *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, had attained great realizations. She looked upon the Master as her 'child Gopala' and therefore considered herself his mother. For this reason she treated the Holy Mother as her daughter-in-law. She used to live at Kamarhati, a few miles from Calcutta, and stayed for a few days with the Holy Mother whenever she visited Dakshineswar. After the Holy Mother settled down in Calcutta, she frequently visited her. In her last days she was taken care of by Sister Nivedita.

The Holy Mother was on intimate terms not only with these devoted ladies, but also with the wives of several of Sri Ramakrishna's great householder disciples, like Balaram Bose, Mahendra Nath Gupta and others.

have seen how she ever retained the temperament of a bashful maiden, kept herself aloof from all public activities, did not appear before men without a veil, and would not even talk directly to them, barring a select few. Yet how could she approve of a Gauri-Ma doing just the opposite of it? Not only that, there were several other women who also took part in public activities with her approval. She blessed Sister Nivedita in her great efforts for the education of women. She encouraged Sister Sudhira to continue Nivedita's work and even allowed her to finance her boarding home for girls by undertaking tuition in families. She permitted a girl disciple of hers to study midwifery on the ground that she would thus be useful to many, although conservative women like Golap-Ma objected to the idea of a high-caste Hindu girl working in a hospital, however noble the motives behind might be. How are all these facts to be reconciled with her own habits of life, so contrary to them in every respect?

Then again the Holy Mother herself was not educated. She was married early in life. When she is spoken of as 'the last word of Sri Ramakrishna on the ideal of Indian womanhood', does it mean that Indian women should follow her in these respects also? These are questions that naturally suggest themselves to a student of the Holy Mother's life.

The difficulty that one feels in this respect can be solved if one clarifies one's idea as to what constitutes the essence of the feminine ideal. It is an

undeniable fact that women's habits and mode of living, their upbringing and the part played by them in social life, have varied from country to country and from time to time. But in this world, even change is a relative phenomenon; it is felt only in relation to something that is comparatively stationary. Thus, behind the great variations in the pattern of womanhood, one can discover an essential unchanging principle that is uniquely feminine and quite distinct from every phase of the masculine ideal of character. We may describe this distinctively feminine principle as the Eternal Feminine. It is a cosmic principle which expresses itself concretely at our physical level through women in their capacity as mothers. In other words, the Eternal Feminine can be equated with motherhood with all its implications, and motherhood, it must be remembered, is the special privilege of woman, in both the physiological and the psychological sense.

It may be questioned why the Eternal Feminine should be identified with motherhood. Why should it not be equated with wifehood, which after all precedes motherhood and also constitutes a special function of woman? The answer is that a woman is a wife, or rather a successful wife, to the extent that she is a mother. The biological function of sex is not the essence of wifehood. In the life of the average individual, sex may be an indispensable part of one's role as wife, but the Holy Mother's example has at least shown us that a great woman can be a

successful wife even if the whole of the biological value of sex is eliminated from her life. Then again, a woman in her purely sexual role is outside the pale of wifehood—nay, she then eschews every one of those sacred functions, responsibilities and privileges that we always associate with wifehood. Thus the essence of wifehood lies in a 'more' than mere sex life, and if we investigate what that 'more' is, we shall find that it lies in motherhood.

For one thing, the position of a woman as wife depends on the home and home life, and whenever these disappear, wifehood, too, is bound to disappear. A home is an institution in which a man, his wife, his children and other dependents share a common life, held together by a cementing force—that force being the influence of the wife over all the other members. Now a wife is able to exercise this influence only to the extent that she embodies in herself the principle of motherhood—the quality by which a woman is able to love disinterestedly, have infinite patience and forgiveness in dealing with the failings of others, and serve others heart and soul without any thought of return. No doubt she reveals these qualities in the first instance in relation to her own offspring, but unless she expresses this unique side of her nature in her dealings with her husband and other members of the family—of course with modifications suited to the needs of different forms of relationship—she will not be fulfilling her position as the wife, the mistress of the family. In any society

where, for some reason or other, women lack this precious quality, the art of wifehood is forgotten, and as a consequence homes break up and family life becomes an impossibility; or even if it continues nominally owing to the conservatism of law, it loses all its sanctity and fails to breed those great racial virtues of which it is the custodian. Such a state of affairs always marks the decline of a culture.

It is, therefore, appropriate to characterize the Eternal Feminine as the principle of motherhood. It forms the central core in woman, whose integrity has to be preserved in the midst of all her changing modes of life, if she is not to lose her soul in the pursuit of aggressive masculine standards. She may be a mere housewife, or become an air-minded or business-minded woman; she may remain behind the Purdah, or take part in public life; she may put on the skirt, or wear the Sari; she may live a married life, or prefer to remain single. All these varying modes and avocations of life are but the cultural garb of womanhood, their differences being dictated by the changing social needs. She does no violence to her nature by following them, provided she remains true to the ideal of motherhood, the eternal feminine principle, and tries to express the love, the forgiveness and the spirit of service characterizing it, in all the spheres of her activity, whatever they may be.

In the light of this explanation the Holy Mother's conduct in encouraging several of her women

companions and disciples to follow ways of living quite different from her own, becomes understandable. In fact she liked to see that Indian women were married a little later in life than was often the case, that they were better educated, that they developed qualities of leadership and self-reliance, and that they were not forced into the married state if some of them preferred to live a life of continence and service in a wider circle than the family. But whatever their mode of life, she wanted them always to remain true to the Eternal Feminine in them—the principle of motherhood—and thus bring into existence a true feminine culture, which is not a mere copy of purely masculine creations. The way in which she remained aloof from the society of men is suggestive of that purely feminine culture, the true expression of the woman's soul.

Her own life was meant to be an example of the pure feminine type. There are many examples of great women from whom one may seek guidance in the lesser accomplishments of womanhood that change with time and country. But one may turn the pages of the world's history and yet not come across another instance like the Holy Mother in embodying the Eternal Feminine in all its purity. She has sometimes been spoken of as Sri Ramakrishna's last word on Indian womanhood. It will be better to amend it as 'his last word on womanhood of all times and countries'. For wife, nun and mother in one, she stands as the fulfilment of the

ideal of a Madonna—not the hazy figure of a distant time and place, like the mother of Christ depicted in the Christian scriptures, but a personality of flesh and blood, boldly imprinted on the canvas of recent history and having a spiritual content that is not dependent on the pious imagination of the faithful. In the light of this idea one can understand the meaning of the Holy Mother's significant words, that the Master left her on this earth to reveal the Motherhood of God.

CHAPTER XVIII

HER MESSAGE

EVERY great personage delivers his message partly through his life and partly through his teachings. No doubt they are mutually complementary, but it seems that in certain spiritual types the message delivered in terms of life is more significant than the message conveyed through words. The Holy Mother belongs to this category.

In the account of her life has been described at length what she teaches man by her life, and the 'Conversations' published in the next part contains the teachings she conveyed through her words. Here only a bare analysis of her message is given with a view to drawing one's attention to its essential contents.

Any great spiritual movement and the personalities inaugurating it have two sets of teachings, interdependent, no doubt, yet each having its distinctiveness. One is the cult side of the teaching and the other the cultural or philosophical side of it. The first is centred in personalities, and the second in principles. The cult side of the teaching consists of the beliefs

and devotional attitudes concerning the personality from whom the movement started, while the cultural aspect is formed of the philosophical and theological teachings of these personalities. Thus the cultural side of Sri Krishna's message is contained in the philosophy of non-attached activity preached in the Gita, and the cult side in the peculiar theory of devotion centring round him. In the case of the Buddha, the former lies in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, and the latter in the theory of Buddhahood, which developed into the Buddhology of the Mahayana system. The cultural aspect of Christ's message is embodied in the Sermon on the Mount, and the cult aspect in the doctrine of his Sonship. In the teachings of Mohammed, the cultural side is represented by his teaching on the unity of God, and the cult side by his claim to Prophethood.

Now both cult and culture are equally important for a religious movement; for its health and vitality depend on maintaining the balance between these two aspects of its spiritual content. The cult is the heart of a religious movement, and the culture the framework of bones and muscles constituting its body. The cult, like the heart of an organism, is the unseen source of vigour in a religious movement. On the other hand, culture, like the body of a creature, is the form through which this vigour becomes expressive, attractive and significant. Without the cultural aspect, cult becomes mere

sentimentalism or fanaticism—in the former case, bearing no significance to the life around, and in the latter, becoming a positive menace to society. So also without the cult and the devotional spirit generated by it, mere culture degenerates into feeble intellectualism or vapid cosmopolitanism, devoid of that dynamism and spirit of self-sacrifice so essential for making any religious movement expressive and significant.

In regard to the spiritual movement inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna, too, this twofold division into cult and culture holds good. The cult side of the teaching may briefly be formulated thus: (*a*) Sri Ramakrishna is a divine incarnation who embodies in himself the spiritual consciousness of the past incarnations and of all expressions of the Deity. (*b*) He is a living presence whom a devotee can 'contact' through love and discipline. (*c*) His life and personality have opened a new way of salvation; for by personal devotion and service to him one becomes a participant in the spiritual consciousness he has created, and this expedites one's spiritual evolution just as a river hurries to its destination an object that has entrusted itself to its current.

The culture side of it is embodied in the great ideals exemplified in the life of Sri Ramakrishna and his apostles, in the teachings of the Master recorded by his disciples, and in the Neo-Vedanta or science of religion preached by Swami Vivekananda, reconciling the varied aspects of the

spiritual heritage that has come down through the different religions of the world.

To get the right perspective of the message of the Holy Mother, it has to be viewed in the light of this analysis. The message of every one of the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna represents both the cult and the culture aspects of the movement, but the proportion may differ. Thus Swami Vivekananda is the most illustrious representative of the culture aspect, his life-work and discourses being the most important factors that have made the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna significant to the generality of men who are not his professed followers. The Swami was an ardent believer in the cult, too, but his conviction in this respect did not find expression in his preachings. The Holy Mother, on the other hand, is the greatest representative of the cult side of the movement. In making this statement, it is not implied that she made no contribution to the cultural side. In fact she has made very valuable contributions to it, as will be evident from what follows. But the distinctiveness and originality of her message consist in that she was the first person to exemplify the principles of the cult which has given to the Ramakrishna Movement whatever vitality it possesses. In that sense she may truly be described as the Sakti (Power) behind the movement.

Her contribution to the cult may briefly be stated as follows: (1) The central idea that forms the

motive force behind the Ramakrishna Movement is the notion that an aspirant's spiritual potentialities are unfolded by service of Sri Ramakrishna through dedicated work done in his name and for the advancement of his mission on earth. Although it was only in later days that this service took an organizational shape, the inception of the idea goes back to the lifetime of the Master when his immediate disciples served him in flesh and blood. Of them all, the Holy Mother is the pioneer and the best exemplar of this new form of spiritual practice. (2) All through her life she bore witness to the fact that the Master is a living presence. The way in which she visualized him when she made her daily offerings and the manner in which she had vivid visions of him in all critical situations, are the assurances we get from her life in regard to this important aspect of the cult.

Thus it is no exaggeration to say that the cult associated with Sri Ramakrishna is based no less on the experiences of her life than on the spiritual power manifested in a unique manner in his person.

Next comes the cultural aspect of her message. It is an aspect in which even those who do not care for the cult will be interested. Her teachings in this respect are to be gleaned more from her actions and behaviour in life than from any formal discourses or lectures. She was born in humble circumstances and had no schooling of any kind. She was therefore no intellectual or an exponent

of any system of philosophy. But her life was rooted in a cultural soil, the quality of which she exhibited as a glorious character and as steadfast devotion to certain ideals. In her life more than in the life of any of the Master's disciples, or even of the Master himself, we find an illustration of the ideal of living in the world but yet being not of it. The most noted of the Master's disciples were monks and though they concerned themselves with preaching, philanthropic activities and administrative work, they all lived outside the family. Even the Master, though married, had nothing to do with the family, except for the very pure and tender relationship he had with the Holy Mother. But in the Holy Mother we find the unique example of one who lived in the circle of her relatives and bore the worries of such a life to the fullest extent, but at the same time kept intact her spirit of renunciation, discrimination and devotion.

The uniqueness of her life, however, consists in that she was wife, nun and mother at the same time. These three situations in life may at first look conflicting, but the Holy Mother harmonized them in her life. She was wedded to Sri Ramakrishna at the age of five, and till the end of the Master's life she kept company with him and served him to the best of her ability like any Hindu wife. But a woman who does this alone and keeps aloof from the intellectual and spiritual life of her husband, either due to deficiencies of endowment or

differences of temperament, cannot be a companion to him in a true sense. How the Holy Mother was a flawless pattern of wifehood in this respect also, how she could easily grasp and fully participate in the spiritual ideals of her husband, and how she made herself fit to continue his work of spiritual ministry after his death—are aspects of her life that have been dealt with at length in these pages. If to be a companion in life to her husband is the fundamental duty of a wife, the Holy Mother has set the highest example of it, and that at a level where such companionship means also the pursuit of lofty spiritual ideals. Being the wife of a spiritual teacher who remained a Brahmachari (celibate) for life and insisted on celibacy as an essential discipline of spiritual life, she remained a nun in spite of her married condition. As such she had no children of the body, but she had such a large number of devotees and disciples, to whom she was a mother and much more, and in relation to them she displayed all the love and sweetness which a woman reveals when she receives fulfilment as a mother. In this respect the Holy Mother is a unique figure in world's history. There have been great wives, great mothers and great nuns, but few, if any, who have been all these at the same time. She, therefore, reveals a new possibility in the field of womanly character.

It is this aspect of the Holy Mother that all have to remember when she is spoken of as the last word

of Sri Ramakrishna on the ideal of womanhood. To follow in her footsteps a woman need not get married at the age of five, or observe Purdah, or remain illiterate for life. These features are the mere accidents of her life, not the essentials of the ideal she represented. But a woman who proposes to follow her must necessarily be a real companion, a real participant, in the intellectual and spiritual life of her husband, have a maternal tenderness in her relation with all, and be austere and godly in her life. The Holy Mother demonstrates that wifely devotion is possible without the attraction of sex, that maternal love can be manifested without oneself bearing children, and that the highest godliness can be cultivated even in the midst of the common avocations of life. Especially today, when changed social conditions are forcing many women out of their traditional role as housewives and approximating them to masculine standards, the Holy Mother reminds them that even in doing so woman need not lose her soul but express her latent possibilities in a wider relationship.

In her conversations with disciples she has left behind a valuable body of instructions, emphasizing certain aspects of the cultural side of the movement. The 'Conversations' published in the next part set them forth in detail. Here only a brief summary of their salient features is given.

In her teachings she presupposed all the important doctrines of the Vedanta, but never entered into the

subtleties of metaphysics or the theoretical exposition of any particular philosophical doctrine. She admitted that in the fullness of one's spiritual evolution, one reached a state in which all manifested phenomena were realized as illusory and even the idea of God was transcended. " In course of time," she once said, " one does not feel even the existence of God. After attaining Jnana (wisdom), one sees that gods and deities are all Maya (illusion). Everything comes into existence in time and also disappears in time . . . God and such things really disappear."

While thus admitting the truth of the non-dualistic goal, she never compromised on the question of the absolute supremacy of the path of devotion in all spiritual striving. Thus when a disciple once spoke to her complacently about the ultimate unreality of God, creation and the rest, she said in reply, " Narendra once said to me, ' Mother, the knowledge that explains away the lotus feet of the Guru is nothing but ignorance. What is the validity of knowledge if it proves that the Guru is nought? ' Give up this dry discussion, this hodge-podge of philosophy. Who has been able to know God by reasoning? Even sages like Suka and Vyasa are at best like big ants trying to carry away a few grains of sugar from a large heap."

Thus the path of devotion formed the principal subject of her teaching. She always impressed on aspirants the need of looking upon God as one's

'own' and of surrendering oneself unconditionally to Him. For spiritual illumination ultimately depended on His grace alone, and all spiritual practices, which men generally performed for attaining Him, were at best only contributive factors, being helpful in the purification of the mind. For this reason she often spoke of God as possessing the nature of a child. A child might not give a thing to a person who asked for it a hundred times, whereas it might give it away to another even at the first request. In the same way the grace of God was not conditioned by anything.

She did not, however, mean thereby to minimize the importance of self-effort. "Everything, no doubt, happens only by the will of God," she used to say, "yet man must work, because God expresses His will through the actions of man. Again, all the facilities that one got in life were determined by one's past actions, and, besides, by one's present actions one can counteract one's past actions." What she sought to impress on the devotees was that they should neither overestimate nor underestimate the value of spiritual practices. It was wrong if one thought that just as goods could be purchased from the market for a price, God could be attained by the power of one's spiritual practices like Japa and meditation. For ultimately it was the result of divine grace alone. If, however, there was any condition in grace, it was pure devotion. So she said, "Neither Mantra nor scripture is of any

avail. Pure loving devotion alone can win everything."

But this kind of devotion, according to her, was the most difficult thing to attain; for it could not be had so long as there was the slightest trace of worldly desire in the mind. Only Isvarakotis (aspirants born with divine tendency) possessed it in abundance, and others attained to it to the extent they freed themselves from all worldly desires. For this reason, she once said that God might give salvation to anyone, but He seldom conferred devotion on men.

Spiritual practices, according to her, were useful in bestowing this purity of mind so necessary for the dawn of devotion. They cut asunder the ties of past Karma and helped to subdue the power of the senses. As the wind scattered the clouds, the Name of God destroyed worldliness. And again, just as by handling flowers or pieces of sandal-wood one's palms caught the fragrance of those objects, so divine contemplation helped one to mould one's mind in His image.

Hence, while maintaining the importance of grace, she always insisted on the value of spiritual practices regularly and patiently undergone. "Don't relax practice," she used to say, "simply because you do not get His vision. Does an angler catch a big carp every day the moment he sits with the rod? He has to wait and wait, and many a time he is disappointed."

She seemed to have attached special importance to spiritual experiences that came as a result of

strenuous practice. "God-realization", she said, "can be had at any time by the grace of God, but there is a difference between it and what comes in the fullness of time, as between mangoes that ripen in the proper season and those that ripen in the month of Jyaishta (May-June). The latter are not very sweet." She also insisted that the normal course of spiritual progress was gradual. Perhaps one had practised Japa and austerities in one life ; in the next life one's spiritual mood deepened thereby, and in the life following, still more and so on.

Among spiritual disciplines, she stressed Japa as most important. According to her, initiation with the Mantra purified the body. God, she said, had given fingers in order that they might be blessed by counting Japa. An athlete was in the habit of carrying a calf in his arms from its very birth. He did it every day and as a consequence he gradually developed the strength necessary to carry it without effort even after it had become a full-grown animal. Exactly similar, she used to say, was the nature of the spiritual progress one made, gradually and unobserved, through the practice of Japa. By continually making Japa thousands of times, one's mind automatically got steadied and absorbed in meditation and one's Kundalini (spiritual power) was ultimately roused. When a pure mind performed Japa, the holy word bubbled itself up spontaneously from within without any effort on its part. One who reached this state attained success in Japa.

Along with the practice of Japa and meditation, she advocated the importance of healthy altruistic works. For men ordinarily could not do spiritual practices all the twenty-four hours of the day; so work performed with a spiritual motive was the best thing to fill up the gap. Without that there was even positive danger; for an idle mind was proverbially the devil's workshop. So she favoured the type of altruistic activities undertaken by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order.

She always advised spiritual aspirants to be patient in times of difficulties and troubles. For misery, she said, was the symbol of God's compassion. In place of getting worried, an aspirant should pray to the Divine with tears in his eyes when he wanted illumination or found himself faced with doubts and difficulties. She impressed on all aspirants, whether householder or Sannyasin, the need of being continent—if they were really serious about their spiritual life. For to have non-attachment to the body and its pleasures was the *sine qua non* of spiritual life. "Today the human body is, tomorrow it is not; and even its short span of life is beset with pain and misery"—discriminating thus, one should cultivate a spirit of dispassion and renunciation, and then the true love of God dawned in one's mind. She put all her ideas on spiritual life in a clinching form when she said, "He who is able to renounce all for His sake is a living god. Even the decrees of fate are cancelled if one takes refuge in God. Fate strikes off

with her own hand what she has written about such a person. What does one obtain by realizing God? Does he develop a pair of horns? No. He gains discrimination between the real and the unreal, gets spiritual consciousness, and passes beyond life and death."

CHAPTER XIX

THE END

IT remains now to record the incidents connected with the passing away of the Holy Mother. In January, 1919, she went to her native place, chiefly in the interests of Radhu, who was expecting a child. The period immediately following was full of anxiety for the Holy Mother because of the terrible ordeal that Radhu, with her bad health and unsound mind, would have to stand, at child-birth. Fortunately she came out unscathed through it, but that brought little relief to the Holy Mother, since Radhu continued to suffer from various ailments. Besides, this time she had to prolong her stay in the village for over a year, as she did not like to return to Calcutta before Radhu's child was strong enough to stand the journey.

During the last three months of the Mother's stay at Jayrambati, her health began to deteriorate very fast. On the 13th of December, 1919, the anniversary of her birth, she got fever, and thenceforth she began to suffer from it frequently. On coming to know of it, Swami Saradananda made arrangements to take her over to Calcutta. She was then in such

a weak state that she could hardly walk up to the neighbouring temple of Simhavahini where she went for worship before leaving the village. And when she reached Calcutta, Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma, seeing her emaciated body and pale face, were constrained to remark to a disciple, " Oh, in what a pitiable condition you have brought the Mother to us! Why, she is black as soot. You have brought here a skeleton covered with skin."

She arrived in Calcutta on the 27th February, 1920, and for the next five months, she suffered from this malignant fever. Immediately after she reached Calcutta, she was placed under the treatment of the reputed Ayurvedic physician, Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati. The treatment at first gave her some relief. But the medicine given was so bitter that the unpleasant taste persisted even at meal time, so much so that she could not take her food with relish. Since the physician could not prescribe any alternative medicine, allopathic treatment was next tried. Dr. Nilratan Sirkar, the renowned doctor of Calcutta, was called in, and he diagnosed the disease as kala-azar, a kind of malignant tropical fever resembling malaria. Under his instruction Dr. Pradhan Bose treated the Holy Mother for two months, but with little result. So the Ayurvedic treatment was again tried.

The fever, in its early stages, used to appear in the evening and subside at night. In the second stage it appeared in the morning and evening, and in the last

stage it continued without intermission, the temperature sometimes going up to 103 degrees. She also began to suffer from an intense burning sensation all over the body, to get a little relief from which she often used to clasp Yogin-Ma. She had constantly to be fanned and ice had to be applied to her palms to give her some relief.

Her diet during illness consisted generally of rice, milk and vegetables prepared according to medical directions, supplemented with fruits. The Ayurvedic physician had directed that, as she was anæmic, she should be given anything she liked to eat, because it might perhaps get digested and help to revive her failing strength. One day, as the girl disciple, Sarala, who nursed her in her last illness, brought the plate of food for her, Dr. J. N. Kanjilal, a homœopathic physician and a close disciple of the Mother, came into the room. He thought that the food was too much and flew into a rage at the disciple. He said that she knew nothing of nursing, that she was killing the Mother through overfeeding, and declared that he would bring two trained nurses to replace her in the service of the Mother. The disciple was very much mortified, but when Dr. Kanjilal left the room, the Holy Mother consoled her saying that the doctor's behaviour was quite unjustified, and that under no circumstance would she allow herself to be nursed by 'those booted women' (meaning hospital nurses). After this incident even the little appetite she had for food disappeared.

During this protracted illness, her nature became like that of a little girl. Often she would say that she wanted to go to the Ganges, of which she was very fond all through life, and would refuse to eat any food until someone agreed to take her. Once late at night the attending disciple, Sarala, was trying to feed her. But the Mother, like a child, said, "No, I won't eat. You always ask me to eat and apply that 'stick' (meaning the thermometer) under the arm." At this the disciple said that she would call Swami Saradananda; for generally she would take food when his name was mentioned. But this time she refused to eat and said, "Call him. I won't eat from your hand." The Swami therefore came upstairs at once. All were astonished to notice the great change in her behaviour towards him on this occasion. Generally she appeared before him only veiled and talked to him through an intermediary. But this time she beckoned him to sit by her side, touched him endearingly on the chin by way of kissing, and taking his two hands into hers, said complainingly, "My child, how they annoy me! They are always saying, 'Eat, eat', and they know only one thing—how to put the 'stick' under my arm. You tell her (the disciple) not to annoy me any more." The Swami consoled her, saying that she would not do so thereafter, and asked her whether she would like to take something. She agreed, but as soon as he asked the disciple to bring some food, she added, "No, you feed me. I won't eat from her hand."

After putting a little milk into her mouth, the Swami said, " Mother, rest a while and then eat." Hearing these words, she said with delight, " See how nicely he speaks! He said, ' Mother, rest a while and eat.' Can't these people speak like that? They have given so much trouble to my child at this late hour of the night. Go, my son, and rest now. Ah! how much he has suffered for me! "

Even when illness and physical suffering had reduced her to the last extremity, her great quality of motherliness persisted. She would never forget to make kind enquiries about people's health, or to arrange to feed her disciples who had to go out on errands. When doctors came, she was very particular about giving them fruits and sweets. If any disciple fanned her, she would ask the fanning to be stopped after a short time, saying that it would pain the hand and that she would not be able to sleep thinking of it. Ramani, a woman of Jayrambati, came with some green palm fruits sent by a disciple and went back with some articles. The Holy Mother could not see her or receive her properly, because she was unconscious owing to high fever. She was very sorry for this and sent her apologies to the woman. Her nephew Ramlal and niece Lakshmi Devi came to see her in sick bed; when they left, she forgot to give any present to Lakshmi Devi, as she was required to do by custom. On remembering this omission her sense of courtesy would not allow her any peace, until she sent a fine

cloth and some money to Lakshmi Devi through a messenger.

About a month before the Mother's passing away, she surprised all by asking the Master's picture to be removed from her room to an adjoining one. When asked for the reason, she said that thereafter she would not be able to go to the bath-room, and that under the circumstances she did not like her room to continue to be the Master's shrine as well. She also asked her own bed to be made on the floor, owing probably to the popular notion that one should pass away only lying on the floor.

Even in this state of her health, she would take anything only after offering it to the Master. When external offering became impossible, she would make the offering mentally. All through her protracted illness, the one theme she used to harp on was resignation to the will of the Master. If anyone asked her as to when she would recover, she would say that it depended on the Master's will. One day she was speaking to Gauri-Ma of the happy and inspiring days she had spent at Dakshineswar in Sri Ramakrishna's company. Gauri-Ma replied that even after the Master's passing away she lived happily in worship and meditation, and that it was only after her assuming the responsibility of Radhu that those days came to an end.

This brings us to that remarkable episode in the last days of the Holy Mother's life, namely, the way

in which she broke that golden chain of attachment to Radhu, by means of which she had tied herself to the world all these years. A few days before her passing away, she ceased to make any enquiries about Radhu. This was quite unlike her usual habit; for ordinarily Radhu was the constant preoccupation of her mind. One day she said to Radhu, "Go to Jayrambati at once. Don't stay here any longer." The disciple Sarala, who was standing by, intervened and said to the Mother, "Why do you say so? You will not be able to live without Radhu." "Certainly not," said the Mother, "I have withdrawn my mind from her." The disciple reported this to Yogin-Ma and Swami Saradananda. Yogin-Ma at once went to the Holy Mother and asked her, "Mother, why do you want Radhu to go away?" At this the Mother said, "Yogin, henceforth she will have to live at Jayrambati. You send her there. I have taken my mind away from her. I do not want her any more." Yogin-Ma replied, "Don't say so, Mother. If you have taken your mind away from Radhu, then how shall we live?" But to these pleadings of Yogin-Ma, the Mother's answer was, "Yogin, I have cut off my ties of attachment for her. No more of this." Yogin-Ma reported the whole thing to Swami Saradananda, who thereupon remarked, "Well, it means that we shall not be able to keep her among us any longer. There is no hope of her life, as she has withdrawn her mind from Radhu." And addressing Sarala, he added, "You

spend a great deal of time with the Mother, nursing her. Try your utmost to divert her mind again to Radhu." The disciple attempted to do so in many ways, but could not succeed. Her vain efforts in this direction were put an end to when the Holy Mother said to her one day very emphatically, "The mind that has been withdrawn will no more settle there. Remember this."

And she proved the truth of her statement one day, when she was put to the test by a very moving incident. One noon Radhu's little child came crawling from the side of her mother who was sleeping in the adjacent room, and tried to reach the Holy Mother's body. At this she said to the child, "I have given up attachment to you altogether. Go away, you cannot entangle me any more." And addressing a disciple who was standing by, she said, "Take this baby away. I don't care for it any more."

She was now fast sinking. When all medical treatment had failed, occult remedies were tried but to no purpose. Gradually, owing to anaemia, the legs began to swell. She could not even get up from the bed.

Five days before her passing away, a lady devotee known as 'mother of Annapurna' came to see her. As no one was then allowed to enter the Holy Mother's room, she sat at the door-way. The Mother caught sight of her and beckoned to her to come near. She bowed down and sobbed out, "Mother, what will happen to us hereafter?" The Mother

consoled her in a low, almost inaudible voice, "Why do you fear? You have seen the Master." After a pause she added, "But I tell you one thing—if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own!" Perhaps this embodies her last message to the world also.

During her last three days she spoke practically nothing, partly owing to physical weakness and partly owing to the deep introspective mood that was now upon her. When anyone went and talked to her, she expressed annoyance. Once Gauri-Ma went to her bed-side and announced herself several times, but the Mother only asked why she was thus disturbing her. In those last days she once called Swami Saradananda to her side and said, "Sarat, I am going. Yogin, Golap and the rest are here. You look after them." This was her last complete utterance. The day before her end, she called the Swami again and tried to say something, but could not speak more than one or two words.

Towards the close there was hard breathing for some time. Just before her passing away, her face and body became very dark and shrivelled, but to the astonishment of those who stood by her, a great change took place immediately after life was extinct. Her shrivelled form was seen to relax, and her face swelled up and assumed a radiant hue. To a disciple

who stood by, her countenance seemed to resemble the face of the image of the Goddess Durga used in worship—mellow and golden in colour, with the expression of calmness and serenity writ large on it. This expression lingered in her face for some length of time.

She entered into Mahasamadhi at 1-30 a.m. In the morning arrangements were made to take the body in procession to the Belur Math for cremation. According to her oft-repeated desire, the body was bathed in the Ganges and was carried in a bier decorated with flowers, on the shoulders of pious devotees. Some of the prominent disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, like Swami Saradananda, Swami Shivananda and Master Mahashay, accompanied by several respectable persons of the city, followed the procession, which at times swelled into thousands. By about 2 p.m. the body was consigned to the flames at a spot near the Ganges, within the Belur Math compound.

Today, besides the vivid impressions of her in the minds of devoted disciples, there are three shrines that specially commemorate her life and doings. In the Belur Math there is a beautiful small temple facing the Ganges, built on the spot where her body was cremated. In the shrine of the Udbodhan Office, her portrait is kept facing that of the Master, just as she used to face it in her lifetime. And lastly, at the village of Jayrambati, in the compound where she was born, the devotion of Swami Saradananda

has erected a temple [1] in her memory, with a monastery attached to it. In that shrine is installed a life-size oil painting of hers, and in the solemn stillness and holy atmosphere of that sanctuary, seated before the Mother's portrait—bearing a mild and meek, yet serene and dignified expression—one still gets a brooding sense of the Mother-Heart that was embodied as Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother.

[1] The reference here is to the old temple. Since then a beautiful and well-designed temple has been built at Jayrambati in memory of the Holy Mother's birth centenary celebrated in 1954.

BOOK II
CONVERSATIONS OF THE HOLY MOTHER

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

IN the following pages is published for the first time an English translation of the conversations of Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna, known among the thousands of devotees of the great Master as the Holy Mother. It is an almost literal translation [1] of a book published in Bengali in two volumes by Swami Arupananda, who served the Holy Mother for many years as her personal attendant. The contents consist of the diaries and reports of her disciples, with omissions of those portions which would probably be of little interest to uninitiated readers.

The translation was begun about six years ago at the request of an American student who wanted to know of the daily activities of a Hindu woman who has had a tremendous influence over the spiritual lives of hundreds of Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Order. Gradually other students, after reading the manuscripts, began to evince the same keen interest in the unique and exalted life of Sri Sarada Devi. They, too, were impressed by the simple and artless

[1] The conversations as published here are considerably abridged. Our plan of abridgement is given in the Preface to the whole book.—Publisher.

life of a woman who transformed her worldly actions into devotional worship, who saw the Divine in the drudgery of uninteresting, duties, who showed a mother's solicitude for the welfare of all who sought her unfailing help in their inner development, and who drew all close to her by the magnet of her unsullied purity and by love that never sought reward.

The Holy Mother was created by Sri Ramakrishna as the last word in the perfection of Hindu womanhood. Born in the quiet atmosphere of a peaceful village of Bengal, and brought up among simple country folk who did not know any of the arts of modern civilization, she was recognized during her lifetime as the 'First Lady' of India. People from all strata of society visited her and felt blessed. She travelled widely and met men and women with whom the exchange of ideas through spoken words was an impossibility; yet they accepted her as the Guru, who teaches more by silent influence than by word. And she was a Guru of no ordinary type. Her daily life was an unceasing performance of duties not only towards her numerous disciples, but towards her relatives as well, who tried their utmost to make her life unpleasant. One such relative for example, was Radhu, a niece of undeveloped mind, whom, with all her failings, the Holy Mother humbly accepted as a beneficent gift of God. In the midst of all these trials and tribulations and even while being subjected to the discomforts of physical maladies, one sees her

unfailingly established in a state of serenity and cheerfulness which demonstrated constant communion with an inner bliss.

During the years of her spiritual ministration, the Holy Mother could show so much naturalness and ease, strength and wisdom, because these were preceded by years of austere spiritual disciplines, both in the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna and after his passing away. The Master was, to her, God-incarnate.

The conversations of the Holy Mother will be a revelation to readers in India and in the West alike. To the Indian woman her life will be a pointer in her present march to a higher position in society. She will learn that India has always respected woman as the manifestation of the Divine Sakti, and that the secret of her power lies in looking upon all men born of the wombs of women as her own children, whose highest homage is to recognize her divinity.

The Western woman will learn from the contemplation of the Holy Mother's life, that to be the equal of man, or to command his respect, she does not have to imitate man's adventure or to enter into a fierce competition with him in all fields of life. For certain pleasing qualities are innate in a woman; they are her divine heritage. Sweetness does not denote lack of courage, nor simplicity lack of wisdom. She bears a cross, as also a true man does, for the redemption of all. A man or a woman by the fulfilment of his or her respective duties attains to

the highest perfection. All avenues of life open upon the infinite horizon of the Divine.

The translator is grateful to Miss Dorothy Kruger and Mrs. Elizabeth Davidson for the typing of the manuscripts and also for helping him in other ways in the preparation of this translation.

SWAMI NIKHILANANDA

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda
Centre,
New York, U.S.A.
February 14, 1939

CHAPTER XX

CONVERSATIONS: FIRST SERIES

(Being pages from the diary of a woman disciple)

UDBODHAN OFFICE, CALCUTTA.

January, 1911

ONE Friday morning Sriman K—came to our home at Pataldanga in Calcutta and said: "We shall go to Baghbazar to-morrow afternoon to pay our respects to the Holy Mother. Please be ready at that time." Well, after all I shall now have the good fortune to prostrate myself at the feet of the Holy Mother! Such was my exuberance of joy that I could hardly sleep during the night. I had been living in Calcutta for the last fourteen or fifteen years. And after such a length of time the Mother was gracious enough to afford me this opportunity to pay my respects to her.

Next day in the afternoon we hired a carriage, fetched Sumati from the Brahmo girl school, and set out to the Holy Mother's house at Baghbazar. I can hardly describe the eagerness and fervour which I felt at the time of this pilgrimage. I reached her

house at Baghbazar and found her standing at the door of the shrine room. She was standing with one foot at the door-sill and the other on the door-mat. There was no veil on her head. Her left arm was raised high and placed on the door, while the right one was hanging by the side. The upper part of her body was bare. She had been looking wistfully as if expecting somebody. As soon as I prostrated myself at her feet, she asked Sumati about me. Sumati introduced me as her elder sister. She had been visiting the Holy Mother for some time past. Then the Mother looked at me and said, " Look here, my child, how much I am troubled by these people here ! My sister-in-law and her daughter, Radhu, are all down with fever. I do not know who will look after them and nurse them. Will you wait for a minute ? —Let me wash my cloth and come back." We waited and she returned after a few minutes. Then she offered us two handfuls of some sweets and asked me to share those with my sister. Sumati had to go back to her school. Therefore we could not stay for a longer time. We saluted and took leave of her. The Mother said, " Come again." This interview of five minutes could not satiate the inordinate hankering of my soul. I returned home all the more thirsty.

12th February, 1911

When I went to the Udbodhan Office on this day, I found that the Holy Mother had gone to the house

of Balaram Bose. I had not to wait long before she returned. As soon as I saluted her, she asked me with a smile, "Who has accompanied you to-day?" "One of my nephews," I replied.

Mother: How are you today? How is your sister? You did not come for a long time. I was anxious about you and thought you might not be doing well.

I was surprised because I had met her once only and just for five minutes. But she had not forgotten us. My eyes were filled with tears of joy.

The Mother said with great tenderness, "You have come here, and I was feeling restive at the house of Balaram."

I was completely taken aback. My sister Sumati had sent two woollen caps through me for 'Khude', the baby nephew of the Holy Mother. I handed them over to her. She expressed such joy at these trifles. She sat on the bed and said, "Sit by me here." I sat by her side. The Mother said with great tenderness, "It seems, my child, as if I have met you many a time before, as if we know each other for a long time." "I do not know," said I, "I was here one day only for five minutes."

The Mother laughed and began to speak highly of the devotion and sincerity of myself and my sister. But I do not know how far I deserve those compliments. Gradually many women devotees assembled. All of them looked wistfully and with great love at the smiling and compassionate face of the Mother. I had never seen such a sight before. My mind was

feasting upon the spiritual joy when someone reminded me that the carriage was ready for my return. The Mother at once left her seat and offered some Prasada. She held these before me and said, "Eat these!" I felt shy of eating in the presence of others without sharing. The Mother said, "Why do you hesitate? Take these sweets." I accepted the offerings in my hand. I bowed down before her and took leave. She said, "Come again. Can you go down the steps alone, or shall I go with you?" She came with me as far as the staircase. I said, "I can go alone. You need not take the trouble." The Mother said in parting, "Come another day in the morning." I returned with a sense of fulfilment and thought, "What a wonderful love!"

14th May, 1911

No sooner had I prostrated myself before the Holy Mother today than she said, "It is so nice that you have come. I was thinking all the time about you. Why did you not come all these days?"

Devotee: I was not in Calcutta. I was at my father's house.

Mother: What is the matter with Sumati? She has not come here for a long time. Is she very busy with her studies?

Devotee: Her husband was not here.

Mother: Well, she goes to school. Do they follow the duties of the world?

Devotee: We do not know, Mother, what the world is and what our duty is. You alone know that.

The Mother smiled. "What a warm day!" she said, and gave me a fan. "Ah dear, you took a hurried meal and ran up here. Now lie down by my side."

A mat was spread on the floor. I hesitated to lie on her bed. But she said, "Why do you hesitate? Lie down! Listen to my words!" I could not help it. The Mother became drowsy and I lay silent. A few women devotees and two nuns arrived. One of the nuns was middle-aged while the other was young. The Mother said, her eyes still closed, "Who is there? Is it Gaurdasi?" The young nun said, "How did you know it, Mother?" The Mother said that she felt it. After a few moments she sat up. The young nun then said: "We had been to the Belur Math. Swami Premananda fed us sumptuously. When he is there, one cannot return from the Math without being thus fed." The Mother gently reprimanded some one of the party for not having put the vermilion [1] mark on her forehead, which is obligatory on every married woman if her husband is alive.

Gauri-Ma learnt about me from the Holy Mother and invited me to her girls' school. About sixty girls attended the school. She asked me if I knew how to sew. I said that I could sew a little, and she requested

[1] In Bengal women put on this mark as indicative of the married state as distinguished from maidenhood and widowhood.

me to teach that much to the students of the Ashrama.

With the permission of the Holy Mother, I visited the school of Gauri-Ma one day. She was very loving to me, and requested me to go there every day for an hour or two and give the girls some lessons. I said, "It is absurd for me to be a teacher with my little training. If you insist, I can just teach them the simple alphabets." But Gauri-Ma was inexorable. I had to yield.

One day, after leaving the school of Gauri-Ma, I went to see the Holy Mother. It was then summer and I was quite tired. The Mother was seated in her room surrounded by a group of women devotees. As soon as I prostrated myself before her, she looked at me and at once took a small fan from the top of the mosquito-curtain. She began to fan me so that I might be refreshed. Then she said anxiously, "Take off your blouse quickly so that the body may be cool." What an unprecedented love! She began to caress me before many devotees. I felt ashamed. All eyes were fixed upon me. Seeing her eagerness, I had to take off the blouse. The more I requested her to hand over the fan to me, the more she insisted with great tenderness, "That is all right! Be a little refreshed!" She brought a tumbler of water and some sweets. Seeing me partake of them, she became happy. The carriage from the school had been waiting for me. So I had to take leave presently.

3rd August, 1911

This morning I went early to Baghbazar. I had the desire to be initiated by the Holy Mother to-day; so I took a few articles with me for the purpose. Gauri-Ma gave me the list of articles and she also accompanied me to the Holy Mother's place. When I arrived there, I found her absorbed in worship. She asked me by signs to take a seat. After the worship was over, Gauri-Ma broached the subject of my initiation. I had also spoken about it to her one day. I had taken some good bananas with me. She was very pleased to see the fruits and said, "Ah, I see you have brought many bananas." One of the monks present expressed his desire for them. Then she added, "Take that carpet and sit on my left." I replied, "I have not yet finished my bath in the Ganges."

Mother: That does not matter. It is enough if you have changed your clothes.

I sat by her side. I felt my heart palpitating. The Mother asked the others to leave the room and then said to me, "Now tell me what Mantra was revealed to you in dream?"

Devotee: Shall I utter those words or write them down?

Mother: You may tell them to me . . .

At the time of initiation the Holy Mother explained to me the meaning of the Mantra that I had received in dream. She at first asked me to repeat that Mantra and then communicated to me a new

Mantra. I was instructed to repeat the first Mantra a few times every day, and then repeat the second and meditate.

I saw the Mother absorbed in meditation for a few minutes before she explained the meaning of the Mantra to me. At the time of initiation my whole body began to tremble. I began to weep, for which I could not divine any cause. The Mother put a big mark of red sandal-paste on my forehead. I gave her a few rupees for offering at the shrine room. She handed over the money to Golap-Ma.

I noticed the Mother to be severely grave at the time of initiation. Then she left the seat of worship. She asked me to repeat the Mantra for some time and meditate and pray. I did as I was asked to do. As I bowed at her feet, she blessed me with the words, "May you attain devotion to God!" Even now I remember those words and pray to her, "Please remember your blessing. May I not be deprived of its effect!"

The Holy Mother was going to the Ganges for her bath. Golap-Ma accompanied her. I also joined the party, taking with me the towel and the cloth of the Mother. It was drizzling. After finishing her bath, the Mother gave the priest on the ghat a coin and a mango. As she made these offerings, she said, "I am giving you the fruit, but it is the *fruit* of the gift that belongs to you." Ah! the priest could hardly realize who made this gift! He could hardly understand the significance of those words! Nor can we, puny

creatures, torn as we are by millions of petty selfish desires!

The Holy Mother changed her dress and gave me the wet cloth to carry. Golap-Ma headed the party while I walked behind. The Mother was between us. She carried some water of the Ganges in a small vessel and offered a little of it at every sacred banyan tree that stood along the way. There was a water-jar near the cistern close to the tap on the ground-floor. The Mother washed her feet with that water and said to me, "There is mud on your feet. Wash it off." As I was looking for some water, she said, "There is water in the jar. Why do you not wash your feet with that?" "You have touched that water. How can I use it?"[1] said I with some reluctance. "Sprinkle a little over your head," replied the Mother. But I hesitated and said, "I cannot use that water." I took some water from the cistern in another jar and washed my hands and feet. She waited for me all the time. Then we went upstairs. She took some offered sweets and fruits in two leaf-plates, and asked me to sit by her. With great tenderness she fed me with the Prasada and also partook of it herself.

Gradually many women devotees arrived. I did not know them. They would take their meals at noontime at the Mother's place. After the worship was over, we all sat to eat. The Mother also

[1] According to the Hindu custom, the water that has been touched by a revered person cannot be used for washing feet.

occupied her seat. She took three morsels of food and then gave me some Prasada, which was also distributed among all others. The Mother now became her former self. She became jolly again. Since the time of initiation she had been altogether in a different mood, grave and introspective—veritable goddess ready to grant favour or punish iniquity. I had been trembling with awe. I have seen her, later on, giving initiation to many devotees, but I have never again seen her in such a grave mood. Laughing and joking, she initiated many persons. They were also happy and satisfied. Goaded by curiosity, I sometimes asked the devotees how they found her at the time of initiation. One middle-aged widow once said in reply, "Just as we see her always. Nothing very particular. I had been initiated before by my family Guru. Afterwards I heard of the Mother and came to her for initiation. She at first asked me to repeat ten times the Mantra I had received from my family preceptor. Then she gave me initiation. She pointed out Sri Ramakrishna as my Guru and another deity as my Ishta. She instructed me to pray thus to Sri Ramakrishna: 'O Lord, please relieve me of all sins committed in this and in previous lives', and so on. I am greatly troubled now-a-days. Can you explain it? I cannot repeat the Mantra for more than half an hour. Someone, as it were, pushes me out of the seat. Do you also feel like that? I often think of asking the Holy Mother about it. But I cannot do so. You are so free with her. Has the Mother

deceived me then?" I never wanted to know all these details. But the lady spoke out all this very frankly. I said, "Please open your heart to the Mother. At first you may feel a little constraint. But it will be easy by and by. We also could not be so free with her at first. Even now she, at times, becomes so serious that we cannot approach her."

In the evening the women devotees took their leave of the Mother one by one. She asked her nieces to meditate and pray. They were late, and she said in a tone of displeasure, "It is evening. Instead of meditating, they are gossipping!" Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma and other devotees prostrated themselves at her feet. She blessed them all, laying her hand on their heads, or touching the chins, or kissing them. She bowed before the image of Sri Ramakrishna and then took her seat for meditation. After she finished meditation, I took leave of her and returned home.

* * *

I was not able to visit the Holy Mother for some days on account of the pressure of my school duties. No sooner had I saluted her today than she began to show her love for me in countless ways. Bhudev was reading the Mahabharata. He was a mere boy, and therefore could not read fluently. The Mother had her other duties also to attend to. It was almost evening. She said to Bhudev, pointing to me, "Give her the book. She will read it quite easily. The reading cannot be closed without finishing this

chapter." It was her order; so I began to read the Mahabharata. Never before had I read a book in her presence. At first I felt a sort of shyness, but somehow I finished the chapter. The Mother saluted the book with folded hands. We went to the shrine room to witness the evening worship. The Mother took her wonted seat and soon became absorbed in meditation.

The Mother completed her Japa, uttering the name of God in a loud voice, and bowed down before the image of Sri Ramakrishna. The Prasada was then distributed to all. After this the conversation drifted to our daily duties. The Mother, referring to her own busy days at Jayrambati, advised us to be always engaged in some work or other, as it was conducive to the health of both body and mind.

Seeing good even in evil

Just in the open square in front of the Holy Mother's house, there lived some people belonging to some parts of India outside Bengal. They earned their livelihood by hard manual labour. One of them had a mistress. They lived together. Once the mistress was seriously ill. Referring to her illness the Holy Mother said, "He nursed her with such great devotion! I have never before seen anything like it. He has shown real spirit of service." She began to speak highly of the devotion of this man.

The idea of a mistress would certainly have made us turn up our noses in disgust. Ah, how often

we fail to recognize goodness when veiled in an evil garb!

A poor up-country woman from the house across the street came to the Holy Mother, carrying a sick child in her arms. She solicited her blessings. The Mother was gracious to that child. She said that the child would soon recover, and blessed it. Two big pomegranates and some grapes had been offered in the shrine. She handed over all these fruits to the poor woman, saying, "Give these to your sick child." The woman was overjoyed at this generosity of the Mother and repeatedly bowed down before her.

11th February, 1912

The moment I met the Holy Mother today and sat down after saluting her, she began to say with great sorrow, "Alas! Girish Babu is dead. Today is the fourth day. His relatives came here to invite me to go to their house. Is it possible for me to go there any more? What devotion and faith Girish had in Sri Ramakrishna! Have you heard this incident? He begged Sri Ramakrishna to be born as his son. Sri Ramakrishna said in reply, 'Why should I care to be born as your son!' But who knows, my child, the inscrutable ways of the Lord! A son was born to Girish some time after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna. A strange boy, indeed! Even when he was four years old, he would not exchange a word with anybody. People would know his mind only from

his gestures. His parents looked upon him as Sri Ramakrishna himself. They kept apart everything belonging to him—his dress, plate, cup, glass, etc. Nobody would use those things! . . .

"One day the boy became extremely restive to see me. My picture was in the upper floor of the house. He dragged the whole household there, and uttering a cry, pointed out the picture to them. At first they did not understand it. Then they brought him to me. Though he was but a young child of four, he prostrated himself before me. Then he went to the first floor and began to pull his father by his cloth. He wanted that his father also should see me. Girish wept bitterly and said, 'I cannot, my darling, see the Holy Mother. I am a great sinner!' But the boy was inexorable. So Girish had to yield. He took the boy in his arm. With his whole body trembling and tears trickling down his cheeks, he came up and prostrated on the ground before me. He said, 'Mother, this boy has made me see your holy feet!' But the boy passed away when he was four years old.

"Once Girish and his wife were airing themselves on the roof of their house. I had been staying there at the house of Balaram. The houses were near each other. I also went to the roof that day. I did not notice that Girish could see me from the roof of his house. His wife said to him, 'Look there, the Holy Mother is pacing on the roof of that house.' Girish at once turned his back on me and said to his wife, 'No, no, I cannot thus stealthily look at the Holy

Mother. My eyes are vicious!' He at once came down from the roof. I heard this from his wife."

15th June, 1912

The Holy Mother was seated with a number of women devotees. I was acquainted with some of them. The Mother was very cheerful in their company. She welcomed me with a smile. I requested Gauri-Ma to bring from the library two books on the life of Sister Nivedita and the Indian lectures of Swami Vivekananda. I wished to read something from the life of Sister Nivedita. The Mother agreed and said, "Please read Nivedita's life. I also received a copy of the book the other day. But I have not yet looked into it." I felt a little shy of reading the book in the presence of so many people. At the same time I was eager to read to the Mother the beautiful biography of the Sister written by Saralabala. So I obeyed her order. The Mother as well as the other devotees began to listen with rapt attention. Their eyes became moist on hearing of the wonderful devotion of Nivedita. Tears trickled down the cheeks of the Mother. Referring to Nivedita, she said, "What sincere devotion Nivedita had! She never considered anything too much that she might do for me. She would often come to see me at night. Seeing that light struck my eyes, she put a shade of paper around the lamp. She would prostrate herself before me and, with great tenderness, take the dust of my feet with her handkerchief. I felt that she

even hesitated to touch my feet." The thought of Nivedita opened the flood-gate of her mind and she suddenly became grave.

Those present began to give their reminiscences of Sister Nivedita. Durga-didi said, "It is the misfortune of India that she passed away at such an early age." Another lady said, "She looked upon India as her motherland. She herself said that many a time. On the day of the Sarasvati Puja she would walk bare-footed, putting on her forehead the mark of the sacred ash of the sacrificial fire." I finished reading. The Mother now and then expressed her feelings towards the Sister. She said at last, "The inner soul feels for a sincere devotee."

It was the hour for afternoon worship. The Mother changed her clothes and sat on the carpet before the image of Sri Ramakrishna. She had made some flower garlands with her own hands to decorate the image. Rash Behari, a young Brahmacharin, had kept near the garland some sweets for offering. Ants gathered around the sweets. Some ants were seen also in the garlands. Mother said with a laugh, "See what Rash Behari has done! Sri Ramakrishna will be bitten by these ants." She removed the ants and tenderly decorated the image with the garlands. Seeing her thus decorate the picture of her husband with flowers before others, Surabala, her sister-in-law,[1] laughed. Later the Prasada was distributed to all.

[1]This is the crazy sister-in-law who figures so often in these conversations. She was the mother of Radhu. The biographical section contains references to her.

On the education and marriage of girls

One lady devotee said, "Mother, I have five daughters. I cannot find suitable bridegrooms for them. I am so anxious about it."

Mother: Why do you worry about their marriage? If you cannot find suitable husbands for them, please send them to the Sister Nivedita Girls' School. They will be trained there. They will be very happy in the school.

Another lady devotee: If you have faith in the Holy Mother, then do as she asks you to do. That will be for your good. If you listen to her, you will have no worry.

Needless to say, the mother of the five girls could hardly appreciate the advice.

Third devotee: It is very difficult to find suitable bridegrooms now-a-days. Many boys refuse to marry.

Mother: Yes, the boys have learnt how to discriminate. They are gradually realizing that the happiness of the world is transitory. The less you become attached to the world, the more you enjoy peace of mind.

It was quite late before I took leave of her that night.

* * *

Another day I went to Baghbazar and found the Holy Mother resting after her lunch. She was gracious enough to request me to fan her. Suddenly I heard her speaking to herself: "Well, you all have come

here. But where is Sri Ramakrishna?" I said in reply, "We could not meet him in this life. Who knows in which future birth we shall be able to see him? But this is our greatest good fortune, that we have been able to touch your feet." "That is true, indeed," was the brief remark of the Holy Mother. I was rather amazed at this confession. Very seldom would she speak of herself in such a way.

I could hardly realize at that time that people might possibly have their secrets to confide to the Holy Mother. I was a foolish girl, so I could not comprehend that. Therefore if I happened to miss her on entering her room, I would search the house for her; I could hardly wait for her to come. One evening two pretty young ladies had been taking the Holy Mother into their confidence in the northern porch of her room when I suddenly presented myself there, not finding her anywhere else. I heard the Mother saying to them, "Lay the burden of your mind before Sri Ramakrishna. Tell him your sorrows with your tears. You will find that he will fill up your arms with the desired object." I could at once understand that the ladies were praying to be blessed with children. They were abashed at the sight of me. My state of mind was even worse. But I was taught a great lesson that day. I took a vow that I would never again go to the presence of the Holy Mother without previously intimating my arrival. A few months later I again met those ladies in the house of the Holy Mother. I was glad to find that

their cherished desire was going to be fulfilled soon.

Gauri-Ma was present there. In reply to our request, she gave us some of her reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna. She said, "I had visited Sri Ramakrishna long before many devotees began to go to him. I saw Naren and Kali while they were quite young." It was evening. The conversation had to be cut short. Gauri-Ma took leave of the Holy Mother. I also had to go. As I was about to take leave of her, she called me to the porch and gave me some Prasada. She said, "Come again. You do not stay here long at a time. Come one morning at seven o'clock and have your noonday meal with us."

8th September, 1912

I was a little busy with some work in the Gauri-Ma's Girls' School. Therefore I was not free to go to the Holy Mother according to my desire. It was an auspicious day when, one morning, I arrived at her place. She was getting ready to go to the Ganges for her bath. At the very sight of me she said with evident pleasure, "I am very glad you have come to-day. It is an auspicious day, being the birthday of Radhika. Wait here till I return from the Ganges." I expressed my desire to accompany her and she first agreed. It was drizzling and Golap-Ma sternly objected to my going, as I would be exposed to the rain. The Mother supported Golap-Ma and said, "Please wait here. I shall return presently." We often noticed her behaving like a gentle young

girl. She would never press her views over those of others. As soon as she came to the street, the rain stopped. She returned home after finishing the bath and said, "Well, the rain stopped as soon as I came out into the street. You also wanted to accompany me. I thought it would have been nice if you had come with me. You could have had a sight of the Holy Ganges." To tell the truth, I was not so eager for the Ganges as for her holy company. For, as we are involved in a thousand and one duties of the world, we can hardly find time to visit her. On those few days when we can fortunately go to her, we do not like to leave her presence even for a minute. Golap-Ma, however, heard the words of the Holy Mother and remarked, "What does it matter if she has not seen the Ganges! All desires will be fulfilled by touching your holy feet." I also nodded assent to these words. But the Mother said at once, "Do not say so! Ah, it is the Mother Ganges after all!" The Mother would seldom reveal her divine greatness through any word or deed. She would always act in such a way that people might take her as an ordinary human being like themselves. Only on rare occasions would she, out of grace to some fortunate devotee, reveal her divine aspect. She entered the room, sat on the bed and said, "Look here. I have finished my bath in the Ganges!" I understood that she had come to know of my innermost desire of worshipping her lotus feet. I said to myself, "Thou art ever pure. It is not necessary for Thee to bathe

in the Ganges to purify Thyself." When I sat at her feet with flowers and sandal-paste, she said, "Don't put Tulasi leaves if any." I worshipped her feet with flowers and sandal-paste. I bowed down to her. Afterwards she began to take her breakfast. She made me sit near her and began to give me, with infinite love, half of every article of food she ate. I ate the Prasada with great joy. As I was eating from the leaf-plate, I was reminded of Saint Durga Charan Nag. I said to the Mother, "This leaf-plate often reminds me of Nag Mahasaya."

Mother: What wonderful devotion he had! Look at this dry leaf-plate. Who can eat it? But he had an exuberance of devotion, and would swallow the leaf which had touched the Prasada. Ah! what loving eyes he had! Blood-shot and always moist with tears! His body was emaciated by hard austerities. He would come to see me. He could hardly climb the steps. His emotion would well up at the very sight of me. He would tremble like a leaf. He would stagger while walking. I have never seen such devotion in anybody.

Devotee: I have read in his biography that he gave up his medical practice and was absorbed, day and night, in his meditation on Sri Ramakrishna. One day his father said in an angry mood, "You are so indifferent to the world. What will be your fate? You will not have a piece of cloth to cover your body with! And you will have to eat frogs to satisfy your hunger!" There was a dead frog in the

courtyard. Nag Mahasaya threw away the cloth he had been wearing and ate the frog. Then he said to his father, "I have fulfilled your two prophecies. Please banish all your anxieties regarding my food and clothing and devote yourself to the thought of God."

Mother: What wonderful devotion to his father! He did not make any difference between purity and impurity. This speaks of his high spiritual realization.

Devotee: Once, on a very auspicious day, he came home from Calcutta. The father reprimanded him and said, "You were in Calcutta near the Ganges. How foolish of you to have come home away from the Ganges on such an auspicious day! You should have stayed in Calcutta and taken your bath in the holy river." But just at the auspicious moment of that day, all noticed water rising in a spout from the courtyard. Everything was flooded. Nag Mahasaya became mad with ecstasy and cried, "Come, Mother Ganges!" He sprinkled that water on his head. The people of his locality bathed in that water and felt as if they had bathed in the Ganges.

Mother: True, even the impossible becomes possible through devotion. Once I gave him a piece of cloth. He always tied it around his head. His wife also is very good and devoted. She came to see me the other day during the summer season. She is still alive.

At this time some devotees arrived and the conversation was stopped. They prostrated themselves before the Holy Mother. She asked me to prepare

some rolls of betel leaves. I prepared two and handed them over to her. She ate one herself and returned the other to me. I left her again to prepare the rest of the betel leaves. The Mother, after a while, came to our room with two devotees. They started to help me and the work was over very quickly. The Mother separated a few leaves to make an offering of them. She was very happy and said, "Ah! my good girls have finished their job so quickly."

The Holy Mother retired to the room of Golap-Ma on the second floor. I went there a few minutes after and saw that she was lying on the floor, resting her head on the door-sill. So I could not step over the door-sill and enter the room. She looked at me and said, "Come in. It is all right!" She was always so free and informal. She raised her head from the sill and I entered the room. I sat by her side and began to fan her. She asked me various things regarding the school of Gauri-Ma. I gave her suitable replies. Just then the two women devotees came there. One of them began to dress the Mother's hair. She separated one or two grey hairs and tied them in the skirt of her cloth. She said, "I shall preserve them as a souvenir." The Holy Mother felt abashed and said with hesitation, "Why are you doing so? I have thrown away so much hair before." She went to the roof to bask in the sun. We also followed her. There were many clothes drying in the sun. She asked me to take them away to the room.

Later, when the worship was over, the Holy Mother asked me to make the necessary preparation for the noonday meal of the devotees. We all sat together for meal. The Mother took a morsel or two. The Prasada was then distributed among us. The two women-devotees mentioned above were with us. One of them was old and had her husband. She had seen Sri Ramakrishna. The other one was her daughter-in-law.

The old lady said, "Sri Ramakrishna gave us many instructions. But we have carried out very few of them. Had we followed his advice, we would not have suffered so much in the world. We are attached to the world and are always running after this or that work."

Utility of work

The Mother replying said, "One must do some work. Through work alone one can remove the bondage of work, not by avoiding work. Total detachment comes later on. One should not be without work even for a moment."

After the meal the Mother was resting for a while. She lay down on the bed. All the devotees were eager to do her some personal service. But she asked them all to take some rest. They all therefore went away to their respective places as they had various things to attend to. I remained there with an old widow who was a contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna. I was massaging the Mother's body. The widow sat by her side and began to narrate the various incidents

of her family life. "Mother!" said she, "you always excuse my shortcomings, but my people are so exacting." I asked her if she had seen Sri Ramakrishna. "Yes, dear," she replied. "I have seen him. He often visited our place. The Holy Mother was quite young at that time."

Devotee: Please tell us something about Sri Ramakrishna.

Widow: Not I. Ask the Mother to tell us something about him.

The Mother was resting with her eyes closed, so I did not ask her. After a while, the Mother herself said, "He who will pray to God eagerly will see Him. The other day one of our devotees, Tej Chandra, passed away. What a sincere soul he was! Sri Ramakrishna used to frequent his house. Some one had deposited Rs. 200 with Tej Chandra. One day he was robbed of that amount by a pick-pocket in the tram car. He discovered the loss after some time and suffered a terrible mental agony. He came to the bank of the Ganges and prayed to Sri Ramakrishna, with tears in his eyes, 'O Lord, what have you done with me!' He was not rich enough to make up that amount from his own pocket. As he was thus weeping, he saw Sri Ramakrishna appear before him and say, 'Why do you weep so bitterly? The money is there under a brick on the bank of the Ganges.' He quickly removed the brick and really found there a bundle of bank-notes. He narrated

Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna

the incident to Sarat (Swami Saradananda). Sarat said, 'You are lucky to get the vision of Sri Ramakrishna even now. But we do not see him.' Why should Sarat and others like him see him any more? They have had enough of him and all their desires have been fulfilled. Those who have not seen him with their physical eyes are most anxious for his vision. When Sri Ramakrishna was staying at Dakshineswar, Rakhal and other devotees were very young. One day Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) came to Sri Ramakrishna and said that he was very hungry. Sri Ramakrishna came to the Ganges and cried out, 'O Gaurdasi, come here! My Rakhal is hungry.' At that time there was no refreshment stall at Dakshineswar. A little later a boat was seen coming up the Ganges. It anchored near the temple. Balaram Babu, Gaurdasi and some other devotees came out of the boat with some sweets. Sri Ramakrishna was very happy and shouted for Rakhal. He said, 'Come here. Here are sweets. You said that you were hungry.' Rakhal became angry and remarked, 'Why are you broadcasting my hunger?' Sri Ramakrishna said, 'What is the harm? You are hungry. You want something to eat. What is wrong in speaking about it?' Sri Ramakrishna had a child-like nature."

Bhudev, the nephew of the Holy Mother, just then returned from school. He had an attack of fever. The Mother asked me to arrange a bed for him. She was preparing to go to Balaram Babu's house to see

his son who was suffering from an attack of dysentery. She finished the evening worship and offered me some Prasada. I said that I would eat it later on. She agreed and asked Nalini, her niece, to give me the Prasada later. A carriage was brought for her. She asked me to wait there till her return. Golap-Ma accompanied her. They returned after an hour. The Holy Mother was glad to see me and said, "I have come back quickly for you. Have you eaten the Prasada?" When I replied in the negative, she remarked, "Nalini, why did you not give her the Prasada as I had asked you?"

Nalini: I forgot to do so. I shall bring it presently.

Mother: You need not worry about it any more. I shall give her the Prasada myself. (To me) Why did you not ask for it yourself? This is your own home.

Devotee: I am not very hungry. Had I been so, I would have asked for it.

The Mother, shortly after, brought some sweets that had been offered in the shrine and gave them to me. I partook of them joyously. I prostrated myself before her and asked her leave. She said, "Come again, dear child. Durga! Durga! Shall I come with you to the ground floor? Can you go alone? It is night." "I shall be able to go alone, Mother," said I. Still she began to repeat the name of God and accompanied me as far as the staircase. "You need not take any more trouble," said I. "It will be easy for me to find the way."

It was the Akshaya Tritiya—a very auspicious day with the Hindus. I came to see the Holy Mother. The old lady with her daughter-in-law, mentioned before, was also there. She was about to give the Mother, as is the practice on such holy occasions, some fruits and a piece of sacred thread. The Mother interrupted her and said, "Why do you give these to me? Give them to Bhudev." Then in the course of her conversation she looked at us and said, "I bless you on this holy day that you may attain to liberation in this life. Birth and death are extremely painful. May you not suffer from them any more!"

* * *

It was the day of the sacred Car Festival.[1] At seven o'clock in the morning I went to Gauri-Ma's Ashrama. She had invited me there for lunch. I had a desire to go to the Holy Mother from the school as soon as possible. We finished our meal at two o'clock. When Gauri-Ma and I came to the place of the Holy Mother, it was four o'clock. The Mother had been performing the evening service at the shrine room. We prostrated ourselves before her. Gauri-Ma took her aside and whispered something into her ears. I was asked to join them later on. I had taken with me a piece of silk cloth for her. I placed it near her feet and said, "Mother, will you kindly use it?" "O yes, darling," she said with a laugh. Just then some men devotees came to bow

[1] A Hindu sacred festival when the Lord Vishnu at Jagannath is taken in procession in a car.

down before her. We retired to the porch. One devotee brought with him some hibiscus flowers and roses, a garland of jasmine, fruits and sweets. He placed these offerings near her feet and began to worship her. What a soul-enthralling sight! The Mother was seated quietly with a sweet smile playing on her lips. The garland was hanging round her neck. The flowers adorned her feet. After the worship was over, the devotee took a little from every fruit and sweetmeat and prayed to her to eat it. Gauri-Ma said with a laugh, "You are in the grip of a staunch devotee. You must eat a little of everything." The Mother also was laughing and said, "Not so much. I cannot eat so much!" She ate a little from every article of the offering. The devotee took the Prasada in his hand and touched his forehead with it. He beamed with an indescribable joy. He prostrated himself before the Mother and then came away. The Mother took off the garland from her neck and gave it to Gauri-Ma. The offered flowers were distributed among the devotees.

As I have already stated, it was the sacred day of the Car Festival. Bhudev improvised a car for the occasion. Arrangements were made for taking the image of Sri Ramakrishna in this car. Gauri-Ma had an important engagement in the school, so she had to leave us. The conversation drifted to Gauri-Ma. The Mother said, "She devotes her energy to bring up the girls in the school. She nurses them when they are ill. She has no family of her own.

Her motherly instinct has been finding expression through these girls. This is her last birth, therefore she has been passing through all these experiences."

The image of Sri Ramakrishna was taken in the car. The Mother from her bed looked at the image intently. She was very happy. The car with the image was taken down. The procession went along the streets and along the bank of the Ganges. The party returned after dusk. The women devotees pulled the car in the porch of the upper floor. The Mother, her two nieces and I joined them. When the car was going along the street, the Mother remarked, "All cannot go to Puri to see the Car Festival.[1] Those who have seen Sri Ramakrishna in this car will realize God."

October, 1912

One day, during the Durga Puja holiday, I went to visit the Holy Mother. I found her very busy. I sat near her. She sent for a devotee who had come from Ranchi. He had brought with him many flowers, fruits, a piece of cloth and a garland of linen flowers. He requested the Mother to wear the garland on her neck. As she did so, Golap-Ma took him to task, for the iron wire of the garland might hurt her. The Mother said tenderly, "No, I have put on the garland over my cloth." I had taken with me some fruits and sweets. The Mother asked me

[1] The popular Hindu belief is that by seeing the image of Vishnu in the car at Puri one realizes God.

to offer them to the Lord. She ate a grape and said that it was very sweet.

The Mother had on her person the cloth which I had given her a few days ago. Pointing that to me, she remarked, "See, I have used it and now it is dirty." I was amazed to see this and thought what infinite tenderness Mother had for even such an unfit devotee as myself.

Nalini, the Mother's niece, was in an angry mood.

Women must have forbearance

The Mother reprimanded her and said, "Women should not get angry so easily. They must practise forbearance. In infancy and childhood their parents are their only protection and in youth their husbands. Women are generally very sensitive. A mere word upsets them. And words also are so cheap now-a-days. They should have patience and try to put up with parents or husbands in spite of difficulties."

Radhu sat near us with her cloth pulled over her knees. The Mother reproved her and said, "Dear me! why should a woman pull her cloth over her knees?" She cited a verse which says, "It is as good as being naked when the cloth is pulled over the knees."

Chandra Babu's sister came to see us. She asked me in the course of conversation, "Is the husband of the Holy Mother still alive? Are these his children and daughters-in-law?" "Goodness gracious!" said I, "have you not read the teachings of Sri

Ramakrishna? He always exhorted people to renounce lust and gold." The lady was nonplussed and said, "Excuse me, I took them for her own children."

It was the time of the Durga Puja. The Mother had a bundle of new clothes before her. She separated the clothes intended for the husbands of her three nieces. She took a cloth in her hand and said, "G.—will put on this new cloth at the time of the Puja and go to the Belur Math."

After the noonday worship, we had our meal. The Mother was resting. I sat by her side and began to fan her. She said with great tenderness, "There is a pillow there. Bring it and lie down near me. I do not require any more fanning." I hesitated to use her pillow and brought one from Radhu's room. The Mother said with a smile, "This pillow belongs to Radhu's mother, that crazy woman. She will make a fuss. Please use my pillow. There is no harm in it." Then she said to Radhu, "Please come here and lie by your sister." The conversation drifted to the remarks of Chandra Babu's sister, narrated above. The Mother said, "Well, you could have easily replied that her husband is there in the shrine room, and that all of you are his children." I said, "All the men and women of the world are his children!" The Mother laughed and remarked, "People come here with various selfish desires. Someone comes with a cucumber, offers it to Sri Ramakrishna, and prays for the fulfilment of selfish desires. This is the nature of average people."

After a little rest we left the bed. A few women devotees were in the adjacent room. Two of them wore ochre robes. They prostrated themselves before the Mother. They brought some sweets for offering. We came to know they were the disciples of Sri Narayan Paramahamsa of Kalighat. Their teacher was just then engaged in performing a grand sacrifice.

On image worship

One of the nuns asked, "Is there any truth in image worship? Our teacher does not approve of it. He instructs people in the worship of the fire and the sun."

Mother: You should not doubt the words of your own teacher. Why do you ask me about it when you have heard the opinion of your Guru in the matter?

The nun: We want to know your opinion.

The Mother refused to give any opinion. But the nun was stubborn and began to press for a reply. The Mother said at last, "If your teacher were an illumined soul,—pardon me for the remark—then he would not have made such a statement. From time immemorial innumerable people have worshipped images and thereby attained spiritual knowledge. Do you want to deny this fact? Sri Ramakrishna never cherished any such parochial and one-sided view. Brahman exists everywhere. The prophets and incarnations are born to show the way to benighted humanity. They give different instructions according to different temperaments. There

are many ways to realize truth. Therefore all these instructions have their relative value. Take, for instance, a tree. There are many birds perched on its branches. They have different colours, white, black, yellow, red, etc. Their sounds are also different. But we say that these are the sounds of the birds. We never designate a particular sound as that of birds and refuse to acknowledge other sounds as such."

The nuns desisted from argument after some time. They then inquired about the Calcutta address of the Holy Mother and said that they would like to see her again. After they had left, the Mother said, "It does not become a woman to argue like that. Even the wise could hardly realize the nature of Brahman by argument. Is Brahman an object of discussion?"

A few days after, the Mother was to leave for Banaras, and I might not meet her for some time. She was extremely kind to me when I took leave of her, and I was so overpowered by her love that I did not exchange a word with anyone that night.

31st January, 1913

The Holy Mother had returned from Banaras. I went to her place one morning and found her absorbed in worship. After the worship was over, she left the seat and said, "I am glad to see you, my child. I was thinking of you and feared lest I should miss

you again. We shall soon be leaving for our country home."

Education of women

It was late in the morning. Radhu, her niece, was ready to go to the Christian missionary school of the neighbourhood. Golap-Ma came and said to the Mother, "Radhu is now a grown-up girl. Why should she go to school any more?" She asked Radhu not to go to school. Radhu began to cry. The Mother said, "She is not quite grown-up. Let her go to school. She can do immense good to others if she gets education and learns some useful arts from the school. She has been married in a backward village. Through education she will not only improve herself but will be able to help others." So Radhu was allowed to go to school.

Annapurna's mother brought a girl with her to be initiated by the Holy Mother. She said, "Mother, this girl is harassing me for being taken to be initiated by you. I could not avoid her. Therefore I have brought her to you."

Mother: How will it be possible to give initiation to-day? I have already taken my breakfast.[1]

A.'s mother: But the girl is fasting. It does not matter at all if you have eaten anything or not.

Mother: Is she ready for initiation?

A.'s mother: Yes, Mother. She has come fully prepared for it.

[1] The general custom is that initiation is given before the teacher takes his meal.

The Mother agreed. After the initiation was over, Annapurna's mother began to talk about the girl and said, "She is not an ordinary girl. After reading about Sri Ramakrishna, she became eager for practising spiritual austerities. She cut her long hair, dressed herself as a man and set out on a pilgrimage. She went as far as Baidyanath, over two hundred miles from Calcutta. She entered a wood and was resting there when the Guru of her mother happened to pass by that way. The Guru inquired where she was staying and informed her father. In the meantime she was kept with the Guru. Later on, her father went there and took back the girl."

The Mother heard these words in silence and then remarked: "Ah! what devotion!" Other devotees present there, said, "Goodness gracious! Such a beautiful girl! How could she go out alone even with all her eagerness and devotion?" Nalini said, "It would surely have created a great scandal in our part of the country."

After the noonday meal all of us lay down to rest in the adjacent room. The Mother also requested her new disciple to rest for a while. She said that she was not in the habit of lying down during the day-time. I said that she should obey the order of the Holy Mother. She agreed but after a few minutes left the bed and went to the porch. The Holy Mother remarked, "She is restless. That is why she had left home." She asked the maid of the girl, "What is the occupation of her husband? Why

does he not keep her near him ?" "He gets a small salary;" replied the maid, "besides, there is no one in his family. He cannot keep the girl alone in the house. Therefore she lives with her father. The husband visits the house of the father-in-law every Saturday and Sunday." Annapurna's mother said, "This girl says to her husband, 'You are not my husband. The Lord of the world alone is my lord.'" The Holy Mother kept quiet without giving any reply.

Some spiritual instructions

The women devotees were talking in the northern porch of the shrine room. That created a great deal of noise. The Mother asked someone, "Go and ask them to talk in low tones. They are disturbing Swami Saradananda." There was no one in the room. I asked her a few questions regarding spiritual practices. The Mother said, "Do not make any distinction between Sri Ramakrishna and me. Meditate on and pray to the particular aspect of the Divinity revealed to you. The meditation begins in the heart and ends in the head. Neither Mantra nor scripture is of any avail; Bhakti or devotion alone accomplishes everything. Sri Ramakrishna is everything—both Guru and Ishtam. He is all in all."

Then the conversation drifted to Gauri-Ma and her disciple, D—. The Mother spoke highly of both. She said, "Listen, my child. Many may take the name of God after their minds have been hardened

by the contaminating influence of the world. But he alone is blessed who can devote himself to God from very childhood. The girl is pure like a flower. Gaurdasi has moulded her character nicely. Her brothers tried their utmost to arrange for her marriage, but Gaurdasi took her from place to place and concealed her. At last she took her to Puri and made her exchange garland with Jagannath and made her a nun. That is to say, she was married to Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe. Thenceforth she has been leading the life of a nun. Such a nice, pure girl! She has been well-educated. I have heard that she is preparing herself for a Sanskrit examination." I also heard from her many incidents of Gauri-Ma's early years and thus came to know that she also had to pass through a stormy life.

A little later four or five women devotees came. They offered the Holy Mother green cocoanuts and some other fruits. One of them was about to approach and touch her feet. The Mother said, "Please salute me from a distance." They offered her a few coins. She forbade them to do so. They then wanted some spiritual instruction. The Mother replied with a smile, "What shall I instruct you about? The words of Sri Ramakrishna have been recorded in books. If you can follow even one of his instructions, you will attain to everything in life." After they had taken leave, the Holy Mother said, "Where is that competent student who can understand spiritual instruction?

First of all, one should be fit ; otherwise, the instructions prove futile."

Annapurna's mother entered the room and said, " Mother, I saw you in a dream asking me to take your Prasada which would cure me of my disease. But Sri Ramakrishna had forbidden me to eat the Prasada of anybody. Still I shall be glad if you will kindly give me a little of your Prasada." The Mother refused to do so ; but the woman began to insist upon it.

Mother : Do you want to disobey Sri Ramakrishna ?

A.'s mother : Sri Ramakrishna's words were applicable so long as I made a distinction between him and you. But I now realize both of you to be identical. So please give me your Prasada.

The Mother had to yield. A little later we took leave of her.

* * *

Another day when I went to see the Holy Mother, she inquired about my husband. I said that he was not in very good health. She asked me to write a letter for her. She dictated it. After the noonday meal, the Mother had been resting for a while when a few women devotees came to her room. When the greetings were over, one of them said, " I have a nice goat. She gives four pounds of milk daily. I also keep three birds. I spend my time with these. I am now pretty old." I was reminded of the words of Sri Ramakrishna : " Mahamaya, the supreme power of cosmic illusion, makes us bring up a cat and thus

forget God. This is how this world is going on." The Holy Mother simply nodded to the words of these devotees. Alas, what a great agony she had to bear for our sake! We did not allow her even to enjoy a little rest. We disturbed her with mere idle gossip. I took leave of her in the evening.

* * *

Sattva quality leads to renunciation

I saw the Mother one night. She was lying on her bed. Another woman was near her. She at once sat up in bed so that I might bow before her. In the course of conversation she said, "At the time of creation, people were born with the quality of Sattva, light. They had wisdom from their very birth. Consequently they at once realized the unreal nature of the world. They renounced it and practised austerity. They were liberated in no time. The Creator found that the purpose of His creation was going to be frustrated. These wise men, who were thus liberated, were unfit for the continuance of the play of the world. Then He again started the work of creation and mixed the qualities of Rajas (activity) and Tamas (inertia) with the Sattva. Thus His purpose was fulfilled." Then she cited a popular verse bearing on the theme of creation, and said, "In our young age we acquired these ideas from the country drama. But now these have become rare."

Some of the young girls, relatives of the Holy Mother, were reading loudly from a book in another room. The Mother said, "Listen, how loudly they

are reading! They have forgotten that there are many people on the ground floor."

Devotees are above caste rules

Radhu's mother, insane sister-in-law of the Holy Mother, entered the room and said, "Lakshmimani (Sri Ramakrishna's niece) is going to Navadvip on a pilgrimage. I wanted to go with her. But you have stood in my way." She left the room in a pique. The Mother said, "How can I allow her to go with Lakshmi? Lakshmi is a devotee. She would sing and dance with other devotees. She would not observe the distinction of caste and would dine with others. But Radhu's mother would not understand this. She hardly knows that the devotees need not observe caste rules among themselves. So she would come back and criticize the conduct of Lakshmi before others. Have you met Lakshmi?"

Devotee: No, Mother.

Mother: She is in Dakshineswar. Visit her one day. Have you been to Dakshineswar?

Devotee: Yes, Mother, I have visited the place many a time. But I did not know that she had been living there.

Mother: Have you seen the Nahabat at Dakshineswar, where I used to stay?

Devotee: Yes, Mother, I have seen it from the outside.

Mother: When you visit the place another day, go inside the room. When I stayed there, my entire world consisted of that small room. . . .

Have you seen Sri Ramakrishna's birthday festival at Belur?

Devotee: No, Mother. I have never been to the monastery at Belur. I have heard that the monks who live there do not like a crowd of women in the monastery. Therefore I hesitate to go there.

Mother: Go there once and see the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday.

* * *

It was evening when I went to Baghbazar to see the Holy Mother. She was kind enough to ask me to spread her small carpet on the floor and fetch her beads. She soon became absorbed in her meditation. Across the lane there was an open space. A few labourers lived there with their families. One of the male members began to beat a woman severely, probably his wife. Slaps and fisticuffs began to be showered upon her. Then he kicked her with such force that she was thrown to a distance with a child in her arms. Then he started kicking her again. The Mother could not proceed with her meditation any more. Though she was extremely modest and would not usually talk even loud enough to be heard by people on the ground floor, she now came to the porch of the second floor, stood by the iron railing, and cried aloud in a tone of sharp reprimand, "You rogue! Are you going to kill the girl outright? I am afraid she is already dead!" Hardly had the man looked at her than he became quiet like the snake before its charmer, and released the woman.

The sympathy of the Mother made the woman burst into loud sobs. We heard that her only fault was that she had not cooked in time. Afterwards the man became his old self again and wanted to be at peace with the woman. The Holy Mother saw this and came back to her room.

Some time later, the voice of a beggar was heard in the lane. He was crying, "Radha-Govinda! Glory unto God! Please be kind to the blind." The Mother said, "This beggar passes yonder lane almost every night. At first he would cry, 'Please be kind to the poor blind.' But Golap one day rightly said to him, 'Please utter with that, Radha-Krishna—the name of God. This will serve the double purpose of uttering the holy name and also of reminding the householders of God. Otherwise you will, day and night, think of your blindness alone.' Since that, the blind man, while passing this lane, shouts the name of God. Golap gave him a piece of cloth. He also gets alms in other forms."

* * *

How to serve the Divine Image in the shrine

I went to Baghbazar one evening and heard the Holy Mother saying, "New devotees should be given the privilege of service in the shrine room. Their new zeal makes them serve the Lord carefully. The others are tired of service. Service, in the real sense of the word, is not a joke. One should be extremely careful about making His service perfectly flawless. But the truth is, God knows our foolishness

and therefore He forgives us." One woman devotee was near her. I do not know if these words were directed towards her. The Mother was asking her to be careful in picking the right kind of flowers and in making sandal paste for the purpose of worship, as also in not touching any part of the body, cloth or hair while working in the shrine. "One must work in the shrine room with great attention," she said. "Offerings and the rest should be made at the proper time."

* * *

It was half-past eight in the evening when I came to the place of the Holy Mother. She was absorbed in meditation in the porch to the north of the shrine room. We waited for a while in another room. The Mother came there and said with a smile, "I am glad to see you, my child."

Devotee: I have brought my sister with me, Mother. Is Aratrika[1] (the evening service) over?

Mother: No. You may witness it now. I shall join you presently.

The evening service soon commenced. Many ladies sat in the shrine room and began to pray. After the worship was over, we prostrated before the image and came to the adjacent room to meet the Holy Mother. While we were at her place, we were unwilling to lose sight of her even for a moment.

[1] A form of worship in which the most important item is the waving of light and incence before the image.

How Sri Ramakrishna sang

A few minutes later, the Mother came to the room. An old lady was learning a devotional song from another. The Mother said, "I am afraid she may not be able to teach the song correctly. Ah, what a great singer the Master was! His voice was so sweet. While singing he would be one with his song. His voice is still ringing in my ears. When I remember it, other voices appear so flat. But Naren also had a melodious voice. Before leaving this city he came to see me and sang a few songs. While taking leave of me he said, 'Mother, if I can return as a man in the true sense of the term, I shall see you again; otherwise good-bye!' 'What do you mean, my child?' I cried. 'Well,' he replied, 'I shall soon come back through your grace.' Girish Babu also had a sweet voice."

Radhu came to the room and requested the Mother to lie down by her. She said, "You go and lie on the bed. These devotees have come from a distance. I should like to sit with them for a while." Radhu still insisted. I said, "Let us also go to your bedroom. You may lie there on your bed." The Mother asked us to follow her. The Mother lay on her bed and began to talk to us about various things. I was fanning her. She said after a few minutes, "It is now cool. Please do not take any more trouble." I rubbed her feet. One old lady was explaining to another about the six centres as described in Yoga. Golap-Ma forbade her to do so. But still she

continued. The Mother heard her words and said to me with a smile, "Sri Ramakrishna with his own hands drew for me the picture of Kundalini and the six Yogic centres." I asked her if she still had the picture with her. The Mother replied, "No, my child. I had then no idea of the devotees coming to us. I have lost the paper."

Married people and spiritual life

It was eleven o'clock at night. We prostrated before her and took leave of her. The Mother sat on her bed and blessed us. She called me aside and said, "Spiritual progress becomes easier if husband and wife agree in their views regarding spiritual practices."

Reverence for the Guru

A few days later when I visited the Mother, I heard her saying, "One should tell even the Guru what is right. It is perfectly proper for the disciple to do so. But the disciple must have unwavering devotion to his Guru. The devotion to the Guru, whatever may be his character, enables the disciple to attain to liberation. Look at the devotion of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna to their Master. This love for their teacher makes them love everyone connected with Sri Ramakrishna's family. They love even the cat belonging to his village."

November, 1913

We had plenty of flowers at our Ballygunj home. The Holy Mother was always pleased with flowers.

One day I gathered a large quantity of them and came to see her. I found her just ready for the worship. I arranged the flowers, and she sat on the carpet before the image. I forgot to keep aside some flowers for worshipping the feet of the Holy Mother. So I was sorry to think that it would not be possible for me to worship her that day. But I soon found out that she had anticipated my secret desire. She herself had separated some flowers on the tray. After the worship was over, she said to me, "Now, my dear child, I have kept those flowers in the tray for you. Bring them here." Just then a devotee came to see the Mother with a large quantity of fruits. She was very pleased to see him. She put a mark of sandal paste on his forehead and kissed him by touching the chin. I had never seen her express her affection for any man devotee in such a manner. Next she asked me to hand over a few flowers to him. He accepted them. I found his whole body trembling with devotional fervour. With great joy he offered those flowers at her feet and left after accepting the Prasada. She sat on the cot and invited me very tenderly to come to her. I worshipped her feet. With great love, she placed her hand on my head and kissed me. I was deeply touched by her blessings.

After a while I found her on the roof drying her hair. She invited me to come near her and said, "Take off the cloth from your head and dry your hair, otherwise it may affect your health." Golap-Ma came to the roof and requested the Mother to make

an offering of food in the shrine room. The Mother came down from the roof. I also followed her after a while to the shrine room. Like a bashful young bride, she was saying to Sri Ramakrishna in a soft voice, "Come now; your meal is ready." Then she came to the image of Gopala and said, "O my Gopala, come for your meal." I was just behind her. Suddenly she looked at me and said with a smile, "I am inviting them all for their noonday meals." With these words, the Holy Mother entered the room where the food was offered. Her earnestness and devotion made me feel that the Deities, as it were, listened to her words and followed her to the offering room. I was pinned to the ground with wonder!

Do not waste even little things

After the offering was over, we all sat together for our meal. Then the Mother asked me to rest for a while. A man came with a basket of fruits. The fruits were meant for offering. He asked the monks what he should do with the basket. They told him to throw it out in the lane. The Mother left her bed and went to the porch. She looked at the lane and said to me, "Look there. They have asked him to throw away such a nice basket! It does not matter for them in the least. They are all monks and totally unattached. But we cannot allow such waste. We could have utilized the basket at least for keeping the peelings of the vegetables." She asked someone to fetch the basket and wash it. The

basket was kept for some future use. I had my lesson from her words. But we are so slow to learn.

Give every man his due

After some time a beggar came to the house and shouted for some alms. The monks felt annoyed and said rudely, "Go away now. Don't disturb us." At these words the Holy Mother said, "Have you heard their remarks? They have driven away the poor man. They could not shake off their idleness and give something to the beggar. He only wanted a handful of rice. And they could not take the trouble to do this bit of work. Is it proper to deprive a man of what is his due? Even to the cow we owe these peelings of the vegetables. We should hold these near her mouth."

* * *

I went to see the Holy Mother again after many days. She had gone back to her country home and returned to Calcutta in the autumn, a few days before the Durga Puja. I visited her one afternoon and found a woman kneeling near her feet and begging with tears for initiation. The Mother was seated on her bedstead. She refused to comply with her prayer and said, "I have already told you that I would not be able to initiate you now. I am not well." The woman was insistent. The Mother felt annoyed and said, "You treat initiation very lightly. You are perfectly satisfied if you get the sacred Mantra. But you never think of the consequence." But the woman was inexorable. All present felt disgusted.

The Holy Mother at last asked her to come another day. Then the woman requested her to ask one of the monks to give her initiation.

Mother: They may not listen to me.

Woman: What do you mean, Mother? They must obey you.

Mother: In this matter they may refuse to comply with my request.

Finding the woman unrelenting, the Mother said, "Well, I shall ask Swami S—. He will initiate you." But the woman started insisting again and said, "I shall be happy to be initiated by you. You can certainly fulfil my desire if you like." She brought out ten rupees and said, "Here is some money. You may purchase the necessary articles for initiation." We all felt mortified at her impudence. At last the Mother was angry and said severely, "What? Do you mean to tempt me with money? You cannot coax me with these coins. Take them back." The Holy Mother immediately left the room. Being hard pressed by the woman, the Holy Mother at last agreed to initiate her on the sacred Mahashtami day. She soon took leave of us. The Mother now found some leisure to talk to me.

* * *

I came to see the Mother after two and a half months. She cried, "Oh! It is almost an age since I have seen you!" In the course of the talk I asked her about the woman whom she had consented to initiate.

Mother: She could not come here on the appointed day. I had said to her, "I am now ill. Let me be well and then I shall initiate you." My words came to be true. She could not come on the Mahashtami day as she herself fell ill. She came here many days later and was initiated.

Devotee: That is true. The words that are once uttered by you cannot but be fulfilled. We suffer as we go counter to your wishes. Many a time, you condescend to initiate people even while you are ill, and thus suffer all the more by transferring their sufferings to yourself.

Mother: Yes, my dear child. Sri Ramakrishna also used to say, "Otherwise why should this body have suffered at all?" The other day I was ill with an attack of diarrhoea.

My sister-in-law was with me. Referring to her, the Mother said, "A very nice and quiet girl. There is only one dish of vegetable. If this be not palatable, then the whole dinner is spoiled." She meant that I had only one sister-in-law in the family. My life could have been made unhappy if she had not been good to me.

February, 1914

I went to Baghbazar one morning with a basket of flowers. I offered it to the Holy Mother. She was exceedingly happy and began to decorate the image of Sri Ramakrishna with the flowers. Some of them were blue. She took these in her hands and

said, "Ah, what a pretty colour! There was a girl at Dakshineswar named Asha. One day, she came to the temple-garden and picked a red flower from a plant with dark leaves. She cried, 'Dear me! Such a red flower on a plant with dark leaves! Goodness gracious! What a strange creation of God!' Sri Ramakrishna saw her and said, 'My dear child, what is the matter with you? Why are you weeping like that?' She could hardly utter a word. She was weeping incessantly. Sri Ramakrishna at last pacified her."

The Holy Mother was in an exalted mood and said, "Look at these flowers with a blue colour! How can one decorate God without such fine flowers!" She took a handful of them and offered them to the image of Sri Ramakrishna. A few flowers dropped at her feet before they were offered. She cried, "Dear me! How they have dropped at my feet before I could offer them to the Lord!" "It is very nice," I said. Then I thought, "To you Sri Ramakrishna may be a higher being; but we do not make any distinction between you and him."

A widowed lady came into the room. I asked the Mother about her. The Mother said, "She took initiation from me about a month ago. She had accepted another Guru before. She later felt that it was a mistake and came here for initiation. I could not convince her that all teachers are one. The same power of God works through them all."

Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna

In the afternoon the conversation again turned on flowers. The Mother said, "One day while living at Dakshineswar, I made a big garland of seven strands with some jasmine and red flowers. I soaked the garland in water in a stone bowl and quickly the buds turned into full blossoms. I sent the garland to the Kali temple to adorn the image of the Divine Mother with. The ornaments were taken off from the body of Kali and She was decorated with the garland. Sri Ramakrishna came to the temple. He at once fell into an ecstatic mood to see the beauty of Kali so much enhanced by the flowers. Again and again he said, 'Ah! These flowers are so nicely set off against the dark complexion of the Divine Mother! Who made the garland?'. Someone mentioned me. He said, 'Go and bring her to the temple.' As I came near the steps, I found some of the men devotees there—Balaram Babu, Suren Babu and others. I felt extremely bashful and became anxious to hide myself. I took shelter behind the maid, Brinde, and was about to go up the temple by the back steps. Sri Ramakrishna noticed this instantly and said, 'Don't try those steps. The other day a fisherwoman was climbing those steps and slipped. She had a terrible shock, fractured her bones and died. Come by these front steps.' The devotees heard those words and made room for me. I entered the temple and found Sri Ramakrishna singing, his voice trembling with love and emotion."

A few women devotees now entered the room and the conversation stopped. It was time for me to take leave. Again the Mother began to talk about God-realization. She said, " Do you know, my child, what it is like ? It is just like a candy in the hand of a child. Some people beg the child to part with it. He does not care to give it to them. But he easily hands it over to another whom he likes. A man performs severe austerities throughout his life to realize God, but he does not succeed, whereas another man gets his realization practically without any effort. It depends upon the grace of God. He bestows His grace upon anyone He likes. Grace is the important thing."

God-realization and Divine grace

Year 1917

I went to see the Holy Mother in the evening. I had been residing at our Baghbazar house at that time and I visited her almost every day. Finding her alone I narrated to her a dream and said, " Mother, one night I saw Sri Ramakrishna in a dream. You had been living then at Jayrambati. I saluted him and asked, ' Where is the Mother ? ' He said, ' Follow that lane and you will find a thatched cottage. She is seated in the front porch.' " The Holy Mother was on her bed. With great enthusiasm she sat up and said, " You are quite right. Your dream is true." " Is it, then, true ? " I said in surprise. " I had the idea that your home at Jayrambati is a brick building.

But in the dream I saw the earthen floor, thatched roof, etc., and therefore concluded that it was all illusory."

In the course of conversation regarding austerity for the realization of God, she said, "Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma devoted a great deal of their time to meditation and the repetition of God's name. Yogin-Ma practised the greatest austerities. At one time she lived only on milk and fruits. Even now she spends much of her time in spiritual practices. The mind of Golap-Ma is hardly affected by external things. She does not even hesitate to eat cooked vegetables purchased from the market, which a Brahmin widow would never touch."

It was arranged to have devotional songs on the Goddess Kali sung that evening at the house of the Holy Mother. The monks of the Belur Math would take part in it. The music commenced at half-past eight in the evening. Many of the women devotees sat on the verandah to hear the music. I was rubbing oil on the Mother's feet and could hear the songs from the room. I had heard them many a time before. But that day those songs, coming from the mouths of the devotees, had a novel charm. They were full of power and thrill. My eyes became moist. They were singing now and then those songs which Sri Ramakrishna had himself sung. At such times the Holy Mother would cry out with enthusiasm, "Yes, Sri Ramakrishna would sing this song!" They commenced the song whose first line runs thus: "The

bee of my mind has become fascinated with the blue lotus of the Divine Mother's feet!" The Holy Mother could not lie down any more. A few tear drops trickled down her cheeks. She said, "Come, darling. Let us go to the verandah." After the singing was over, I saluted the Mother and returned home.

22nd July, 1918

It was half past seven in the evening when I arrived at the house of the Holy Mother. Only two months back she had returned from her village home, emaciated by a protracted attack of malaria. She greeted me with her usual smile and said, "It is a very warm day. Take a little rest and refresh yourself. What about your sister? Has she reached home?"

Devotee: Yes, Mother. I started after she had reached home.

Mother: Take this fan for Radhu, and rub this medicated oil on my back. There are heat-blisters all over my body.

As I started rubbing the oil, the bell rang for evening worship. The Holy Mother sat on her bed and saluted God with folded hands. Other devotees went to the shrine room to witness the worship.

The meaning of misery

The Mother said, "Everybody says regretfully, 'There is so much misery in the world. We have prayed so much to God, but still there is no end of misery.' But misery is only the gift of God. It is the symbol of His compassion. Is it not so?"

That day my mind had been greatly troubled. Did she really know it and therefore address those words to me? The Mother continuing said, "Who has not suffered from misery in this world? Brinde, the woman devotee of Krishna, said to him, 'Who says that you are compassionate? In your incarnation as Rama you made Sita weep for you all through her life. And in this incarnation of Krishna, Radha has been weeping on your account. Your parents suffered extreme agony in the prison of Kamsa and cried day and night uttering your name. Then why do I repeat your name? It is because your name removes all fear of death.'"

Referring to a woman, the Holy Mother said, "People of that appearance are generally devoid of Bhakti, devotion to God. I have heard it from Sri Ramakrishna."

Devotee: Yes, Mother, I have read in the *Kathamrita*[1] that he used to say that people who are not frank cannot make real spiritual progress.

Mother: Oh, you are referring to that. He said those words in the house of a devotee named Naren. A man had a mistress. She once came to Sri Ramakrishna and said with repentance, "That man ruined me. Then he robbed me of my money and jewelleries." Sri Ramakrishna was aware of the innermost contents of people's minds. But still he

Confession and absolution from sin

[1] A book on Sri Ramakrishna's teachings in Bengali. Its English translation is known as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

would like to hear about things from their own mouth. He said to that woman, "Is it true? But he used to give us tall talks about devotion." Then he described those traits which stand in the way of spirituality. In the end the woman confessed to him all her sins and was thus released from their evil effects.

Nalini: How is it possible, Mother? How can one be absolved from sin by simply expressing it in words? Is it possible to wash away sin in this manner?

Mother: Why not, my dear child? Sri Ramakrishna was a perfect soul. Certainly one can be free from sin by confessing it to one like him. Listen: If at a certain place people talk of virtue and vice, those present there must take a share of those qualities.

Nalini: How is it possible?

Mother: Let me explain. Imagine a man confessed to you his virtue or vice. Whenever you will think of that man you will remember his virtuous or sinful acts. And they will thus leave an impression upon your mind. Is it not true, my child?

Again the talk turned to human misery, affliction and worry. The Mother said, "Many people come to me and confess their worries. They say, 'We have not realized God. How can we attain to peace?' Thereupon the thought would flash in my mind: 'Why do they say so? Am I then a superhuman being? I never knew what worry was. And the vision of God,—it lies, as it were, in the palm of my hand. Whenever I like it, I can have it. . . .'"

She continued, saying, " The *Kathamrita* by M. is very nice. This is because he has put down the exact words of the Master. How sweet are those words! I hear that he has enough materials for four or five books like that. But now he is old. I doubt if he will be able to undertake the task of bringing it all out as books. He has amassed a great deal of money from the sale of the book. The amount has been kept in deposit. He has given one thousand rupees for building my house at Jayrambati, besides meeting other incidental expenses. He also sends me ten rupees every month. He gives twenty rupees or more when I stay in Calcutta. Formerly he used to give me two rupees a month. He was then a school teacher."

Devotee: I hear that Girish Babu contributed in the beginning a large amount of money for the maintenance of the monks.

Mother: Not a large amount. Suresh Mitra was rather munificent in his contribution. Girish also gave money now and then. He at one time defrayed all my expenses for a year and a half. How could he make a large contribution? He was never a rich man. The early part of his life was not very clean. He lived in bad company and acted on the stage. But he was a man of wonderful faith. Therefore he received the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. In this incarnation Sri Ramakrishna has redeemed Girish. The life of each incarnation of God is marked by similar incidents. Gauranga saved the two brothers—Jagai and Madhai. Again, Sri Ramakrishna once remarked

that Girish had within him the trait of Siva. What is there in money, my child? Sri Ramakrishna could not touch it. His hand would recoil before money. He said, "This world is illusory. Had I known it to be otherwise, I would have covered your Kamarpukur with leaves of gold. But I know the world to be impermanent. God alone is real."

Maku, her niece, said sorrowfully, "I could not settle myself at one place!" The Mother replied, "How is that? Wherever you live, you must feel quite at home. You think that you will be happy at your husband's place. How is that possible? He gets a small salary. How can you manage with such a pittance? You are staying with me. It is just like your father's place. Married girls sometimes live with their parents, do they not? Can't you practise renunciation a little?"

Yogin-Ma was then standing by the window, and I was talking to her. The Mother said, "Come in. I seldom see you nowadays." Yogin-Ma laughed and entered the room. Her foot touched my body. As she was about to salute me with folded hands, I interrupted her and prostrated myself before her. "What is this, Yogin-Ma?" said I, "I am not even fit to take the dust of your feet. Why should you salute me if your foot touched my body?" In reply Yogin-Ma said, "Why not? A snake, whether big or small, is a snake all the same. You are all devotees and therefore worthy of our respect." I looked at the Mother. The same compassionate smile lit her face. I took leave of her late at night.

28th July, 1918

It was evening when I visited the Holy Mother at her Baghbazar home. Just before evening service an elderly widow came and saluted the Mother by placing her head on the feet of the Mother. The Mother was greatly annoyed and said, "Why do you touch the feet with the head? I am not doing well at all. This sort of thing makes me worse." The Holy Mother washed her feet after the widow had left the place.

Later, while I was rubbing the Mother's body with medicated oil, the conversation drifted to Lalit Babu, a great householder devotee. I said, "He was at one time fatally ill. But I heard that he recovered through your grace."

Mother: He had many unfulfilled desires. He was very seriously ill with dropsy and was on the point of death. He said to me in a very plaintive voice, "Mother, I have a great desire to build temples and hospitals at Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. But this great desire is not going to be fulfilled." Ah, Sri Ramakrishna saved his life that time. Now he wants to carry out his plans. Let him try. He has bought a tank for me.

29th July, 1918

On Swami Premananda

Swami Premananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, passed away in the evening. I went to see the Mother at dusk. The Mother said, "Come in, my child. Take

your seat. Today my Baburam (Swami Premananda) has passed away. I have been weeping since morning." She again burst into tears. Continuing she said, "Baburam was dearest to my heart. The strength, devotion, reason and all the virtues of the Belur Math were embodied in him. He was the very light of the Math. His mother was a poor woman. She inherited her father's property. She became a little proud of it. She herself confessed it to me and said, 'I had some gold ornaments and I thought of the world as a mere mud-puddle.' She left behind four children. The fifth one she lost before her own death."

After a while I saw the Holy Mother placing her head at the feet of the picture of Sri Ramakrishna hung on the southern wall of the room and uttering in a heart-rending voice, "Lord, you have taken away my Baburam!" I could hardly restrain my tears.

Golap-Ma was also seriously ill with blood dysentery. She was almost on her death-bed.

30th July, 1918

It was half past seven in the evening. The Holy Mother was seated in the shrine room. This day, too, her conversation turned on the late Swami Premananda. She said, "My child, in the body of Baburam there was neither flesh nor blood after his last illness. It was a mere skeleton." Chandra Babu came to the room and joined in our talk. He told the Mother

that some devotees gave sandal-wood, butter, flowers, incense, etc., worth four or five hundred rupees for the cremation of the Swami's body. The Mother remarked, "Their money is, indeed, blessed. They have spent it for a devotee. God has given them abundantly and will give them more." Chandra Babu left the room.

A great soul and an ordinary man contrasted

"Listen, my child," she continued, "however spiritual a man may be, he must pay the tax for the use of the body to the last farthing.[1] But the difference between a great soul and an ordinary man is this: The latter weeps while leaving this body, whereas the former laughs. Death seems to him mere play.

Reminiscences of Swami Premananda and Sri Ramakrishna

"Ah, my dear Baburam came to Sri Ramakrishna while he was a mere boy. Sri Ramakrishna used to make great fun with the boys. Naren (Swami Vivekananda) and Baburam would roll on the ground with side-splitting laughter. While living in the Cossipore garden, I was once climbing the steps, carrying a pitcher with five pounds of milk. I felt giddy and the milk spilt on the ground. My heels were dislocated. Naren and Baburam ran there and took care of me. There was a great inflammation of the feet. Sri Ramakrishna heard of the accident and said to Baburam, 'Well, Baburam,

[1] *i.e.*, undergo suffering and death incidental to the embodied state.

it is a nice mess I am now in. Who will cook my food? Who will feed me now?' He was then ill with cancer in the throat and lived only on farina pudding. I used to make it and feed him in his room in the upper storey of the house. I had, then, a ring in my nose. Sri Ramakrishna touched his nose and made the sign of the ring by describing a circle with his finger, in order to indicate me. He then said, 'Baburam, can you put her (making the sign) in a basket and carry her on your shoulder to this room?' Naren and Baburam were convulsed with side-splitting laughter. Thus he used to cut jokes with them. After three days the swelling subsided. Then they helped me to go upstairs with his meals.

"Baburam used to tell his mother, 'How little you love me! Do you love me as Sri Ramakrishna does?' 'How foolish!' she would reply, 'I am your mother, and I do not love you! What do you mean?' Such was the depth of Sri Ramakrishna's love. While four years old, Baburam would say, 'I will not marry, or else I will die.' When Sri Ramakrishna was suffering from cancer in the throat and could not swallow his food, he said one day, 'I shall eat later on in my subtle body through a million mouths.' Baburam replying said, 'I do not care for your million mouths or your subtle body. What I want is that you should eat through this mouth and that I should see this gross body.'

"Sri Ramakrishna never accepted anyone with numerous children. A man begetting twenty-five

children! What a shame! Is he a man! No self-control! He is a veritable beast!"

Golap-Ma had been suffering from an attack of blood dysentery. She was slightly better today. The doctor observed that it would take three months to be cured completely. The Holy Mother said, "Blood dysentery is not a simple disease. Sri Ramakrishna would often be down with that disease. It happened frequently during the rainy season. At one time he was rather seriously ill. I used to attend on him. A woman from Banaras had come to Dakshineswar. She suggested a remedy. I followed her directions and the Master was soon cured. The woman could not be seen any more. I never met her again. She had really helped me a great deal. I inquired about her at Banaras but could not find her. We have often seen that whenever Sri Ramakrishna felt the need, people would come of themselves to Dakshineswar and then disappear just as suddenly.

"I also suffered from dysentery, my child. The body became a mere skeleton. I would lay myself down near the tank. One day I saw my reflection in the water and noticed that all that remained of my body was only a few bones. I thought, 'Dear me! What is the use of this body? Let me give it up. Let me leave it here.' A woman came and said, 'Hallo, Mother! Why are you here? Come, let us go home.' She took me home." Late at night, I took my leave of the Holy Mother.

31st July, 1918

Today I found the Mother alone and therefore had a long talk with her. Our conversation mainly drifted to the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Perhaps, on account of the passing away of Swami Premananda, the Mother had been continually thinking of these monks. Referring to them, the Holy Mother said, "Sri Ramakrishna accepted his disciples after thoroughly examining them. What an austere life they led at the Baranagore monastery after his passing away! Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda) and others often starved themselves. They spent all their time in meditation and prayer. One day these young monks were talking among themselves: 'We have renounced everything in the name of Sri Ramakrishna. Let us see if he would supply us with food if we simply depend upon him. We will not tell anybody about our wants. We will not go out for begging!' They covered their bodies with sheets of cloth and sat down for meditation. The whole day passed. It was late at night. They heard somebody knocking at the door. Naren left the seat and asked one of his brother monks, 'Please open the door and see who is there. First of all, notice if he has anything in his hand.' What a miracle! As soon as the door was opened, it was found that a man was standing there. He had brought some delicious food from the temple of Gopala on the bank of the Ganges. They were exceedingly happy and felt convinced of the

The monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

protecting hand of Sri Ramakrishna. They offered that food to Sri Ramakrishna at that late hour of the night and partook of the Prasada. Such things happened many a time . . . Now the monks do not experience any such difficulty. Alas! What hardship Naren (Swami Vivekananda) and Baburam (Swami Premananda) passed through! Even my Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda), who is now the President of the Ramakrishna Mission, had to cleanse the pots and kettles, many a day. At one time Naren was travelling as an itinerant monk in Northern India. He did not get any food for two days and was lying down under a tree. He found a man standing near him, with delicious food and a jar of water in his hands. The man said, 'Here is the Prasada of Rama. Please accept it.' Naren said, 'You do not know me, my good friend. You have made a mistake. Perhaps you have brought these articles for someone else.' The man said with utmost humility, 'No, revered sir. I have brought this food solely for you. I was enjoying a little nap at noontime when I saw a man in dream. He said: Get up quickly. A holy man is lying under yonder tree. Give him some food. I dismissed the whole thing as mere dream. Therefore I turned on my side and again fell asleep. Then I again dreamt of the man, who said, giving me a push: I am asking you to get up and still you are sleeping! Carry out my order without any more delay. Then I thought that it was not an illusory dream. It was the command of

Rama. Therefore in obedience to His command I brought these articles for you, sir.' Naren realized that it was all due to the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, and cheerfully accepted the food.

" A similar incident happened another day. Naren was travelling in the Himalayas for three days without any food. He was about to faint when a Mussalman Fakir gave him a cucumber. It saved his life that time. After his return from America, Naren was one day addressing a meeting at Almora. He saw that Mussalman seated in a corner. Naren at once went to him, took him by the hand, and made him sit in the centre of the gathering. The audience was surprised. Naren said, ' This gentleman saved my life once.' He then narrated the whole incident. He also gave the Fakir some money. But at first he refused to accept the gift. He said, ' What have I done that you are so anxious to make me a gift ? ' Naren did not yield and pressed some money into his pocket.

" Naren took me to the Belur Math at the time of the first Durga Puja festival, and through me gave twenty-five rupees to the priest as his fee. They spent fourteen hundred rupees on that auspicious occasion. The place became crowded with people. The monks worked hard. Naren came to me and said, ' Mother, please make me lie down with fever.' No sooner had he said this than he was laid down with a severe attack of fever. I thought, ' Goodness gracious ! What is this ? How will he be cured ? '

'Do not be anxious, Mother,' said Naren, 'I have myself begged for this fever. My reason is this. The boys are working hard. But if I see the slightest mistake, I shall fly into a rage and abuse them. I may even give them slaps. It will be painful to them as well as to me. Therefore I thought it would be better to lie down with fever for some time.' When the day's function was over, I came to him and said, 'Dear child, the work is over now. Please get up.' Naren said that he was all right and got up from bed.

" Naren brought also his own mother to the Math at the time of the Durga Puja. She roamed from one garden to another and picked chillies, egg-plants, etc. She felt a little proud, thinking that it was all due to her son, Naren. Naren came to her and said, 'What are you doing there? Why do you not go and meet the Holy Mother? You are simply picking up these vegetables. Maybe, you are thinking that your son has done all this work. No, mother. You are mistaken. It is He who has done all this. Naren is nothing.' Naren meant that the Math was founded through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. What great devotion! . . . My Baburam is dead! Alas! who will look after the Durga Puja this year? "

8th June, 1918

When I went to-day to see the Holy Mother, I found her in the porch, absorbed in meditation. Some time after, five or six women devotees came to her to pay their respects. They prostrated themselves

before the image of Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine room. The Mother asked them about themselves. Nalini introduced them. One of them had come to Calcutta for treatment. The doctor had diagnosed her trouble as tumour in the abdomen. He had asked her to be operated. She was extremely nervous about the operation. The Holy Mother did not allow any of them to touch her feet. I do not know the reason. They begged her again and again to let them take the dust of her feet. The Mother firmly asked them to bow to her from a distance. They pointed to the sick girl and said, "Please bless her so that she may be cured. May she be able to pay her respects to you again." The Mother answered them, saying, "Bow down before Sri Ramakrishna and pray to Him sincerely. He is everything." The Holy Mother appeared to be restive and said to them, "Good-bye, my children. It is getting late for you."

After they had left, the Mother said, "Please sweep the room and sprinkle it with Ganges water. It is now time for food-offering for the Lord." Her order was at once carried out.

She lay down on the bed and gave me a fan, saying, "My child, please fan me a little. The whole body is burning. My salutation to your Calcutta! People come here and lay before me the catalogue of their sorrows. Again there are others who have committed many sinful acts. There are still others who have procreated twenty-five children! They weep because

The woes of spiritual ministry

ten of them are dead! Are they human beings? No! They are veritable beasts. No self-control! No restraint! It is therefore that Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'One seer of milk mixed with five seers of water! It is so difficult to thicken such milk. My eyes have become swollen by constantly blowing the fire to keep it burning. It is such a hard job to thicken such milk! Where are my sincere children who are ready to renounce everything for God? Let them come to me. Let me talk to them. Otherwise life is so unbearable.' These words are so true. Please move the fan, dear child. People have been streaming here today since four o'clock in the afternoon. I cannot bear the misery of people any more.

"The wife of Balaram also came here today. She is the sister of my Baburam. She wept bitterly for him. She said, 'Is he only an ordinary brother to me? He is a veritable God.'"

4th August, 1918

I found the Holy Mother engaged in conversation with a widow, the sister of Dr. B—. The doctor's sister had become widowed at an early age. There were some troubles regarding the property left by her husband. She could not secure the probate of the will. They were talking about these things, and at last the Holy Mother said to the widow, "As you have no right to sell the property, I would advise you to place it under the care of a good man. A worldly-minded person can never be trusted in money matters.

Only a real monk can resist the temptation of money. Please do not worry so much, my child. Let the will of God be done. You have been following the right path. The Lord will never put you to any difficulty. Good-bye. Write to me now and then, and come again."

After the widow had left, Shyamadas, the Ayurvedic physician, came to see Golap-Ma. The Holy Mother waited a while for him, but when she found that he had left the house, she lay down on her bed and looking at me said, "Now do your duty." I began to rub her body with the medicated oil. The Mother said, "The sister of Girish Ghosh was very fond of me. She would always keep apart for me a little of all the articles of food she cooked at home and send them here. A Brahmin would bring them, and she would sit by me as I ate them. Her love for me was deep. She had been married in an aristocratic family and owned considerable wealth; but her relatives had squandered away the money. Atul, the brother of Girish, started business with five thousand rupees. Besides, she had had to spend a large amount of money for her husband's illness which lasted for a year. In her will she expressed her desire to leave a hundred rupees for me. While alive, she was ashamed to give me this amount. She thought one hundred rupees was too small an amount! After her passing, her brother came here and gave it to me. She had come to see me on the day previous to the Durga Puja. As long as she stayed, she never left me even for a

second. I planned to go to Banaras immediately after the Durga Puja. I was a little busy arranging my things and was moving from room to room. At last she said, 'May I take my leave now?' I was a little absent-minded and said, 'Yes, go.' She hurried down the stairs. As soon as she left, I said to myself, 'What a foolish thing have I done! Did I say to her: Go![1] Never before did I say such a thing to anybody. And, alas, she never came back.[2] I do not know why such words came out of my mouth."

* * *

I went to the Udbodhan Office in the evening. The Mother was lying in bed. Radhu also was lying by her side on another mat and was pressing her to tell a story. The Mother requested me to tell one instead. I was in a quandary. I did not know what to say. I knew the story of Mirabai, the great Vaishnava saint. I narrated it. As I recited the song of Mirabai which ends in the line, "God cannot be realized without love", the Mother cried out in an exalted mood, "Yes, it is very true. Nothing can be achieved without sincere love." But Radhu did not appreciate the story very much. Sarala at last came to my rescue. She told a story from the fairy tales. That pleased Radhu. The Holy Mother was very fond of Sarala. She had to nurse Golap-Ma

[1] The Indian custom is that anyone taking leave should be told, "Come again." It is very inauspicious to say 'Go' to anybody.

[2] She passed away that very night.

who was ill, and so left the room after a while. Then Radhu asked me to massage her feet, but she was not pleased with my doing and requested me to give her a harder massage. The Mother said, "Sri Ramakrishna taught me the art of massaging by massaging my own body. Let me see your hand." I stretched out my hand towards her. She showed me how to massage. Radhu fell asleep very soon. The Mother said, "The mosquitoes are biting my feet. Please pass your hand gently over them." She was quiet for a while and then said, "This year is a very bad one for the Belur Math. Baburam, Devavrata and Sachin have passed away."

I had heard that Swami Brahmananda had seen disembodied spirits in the Udbodhan Office a few days before the death of Devavrata Maharaj. I asked her about the incident. The Mother said, "Please talk softly, my child; otherwise they will be frightened. Sri Ramakrishna also often saw many such spirits. One day he had been to the garden house of Benipal with Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda). He was strolling in the garden when a spirit came to him and said, 'Why did you come here? We are being scorched. We cannot endure your presence. Leave this place at once.' How could it stand his purity and blazing holiness? He left the place with a smile. He did not disclose it to anybody.

"Immediately after supper he asked someone to call for a carriage, though it had been previously arranged that he would spend the night there. A

carriage was brought and he returned to Dakshineswar that very night. I heard the sound of the wheels near the gate. I strained my ears and heard Sri Ramakrishna speaking with Rakhal. I was startled. I thought, 'I do not know if he has taken his supper. If not, where can I get any food from at this dead of night?' I always used to keep something in the store for him, at least farina. He would ask for food at odd hours. I was quite sure of his not coming back that night and so my store was empty. All the gates of the temple-garden were barred and locked. It was one o'clock in the morning. He clapped his hands and began to repeat the names of God. The entrance gate was opened. I was thinking anxiously what to do about his food in case he was hungry. He shouted to me, 'Don't be anxious about my food. I have finished my supper.' Then he narrated to Rakhal the story of the ghost. Rakhal was startled and said, 'Dear me! It was really wise of you not to have told me about it at that time. Otherwise my teeth would have been set on edge through fear. Even now I am seized with fear.'" The Mother ended the story with a hearty laugh.

Devotee: Mother, those spirits must have been foolish. Instead of asking him for their liberation, they told him to go away.

Mother: They will, no doubt, be liberated. His presence cannot be in vain. Once Naren (Swami Vivekananda) liberated a disembodied spirit in Madras.

I narrated one of my dreams to the Mother. I said, "Mother, I once dreamt that I was going to some place with my husband. We came to a river, the other bank of which could not be seen. We were going by the shady track along the river when a golden creeper so entwined my arms that I could not free them from it. From the other side of the river came a dark-complexioned boy with a ferry-boat. He said, 'Cut off the creeper from your arm and then only will I take you across the river.' I cut off almost the whole creeper but the last bit I could not get rid of. In the meantime my husband also disappeared. In despair I said to the boy, 'I cannot get rid of this bit. You must take me to the other side.' With these words I jumped into the boat. It sailed and my dream vanished."

The Mother said, "The boy whom you have seen is none other than Mahamaya, the great cosmic Illusionist. She took you across the waters of the world in that form. Everything, husband, wife, or even the body, is only illusory. These are all shackles of illusion. Unless you can free yourself from these bondages, you will never be able to go to the other shore of the world. Even this attachment to the body, the identification of the self with the body, must go. What is this body, my darling? It is nothing but three pounds of ashes when it is cremated. Why so much vanity about it? However strong or beautiful this body may be, its culmination is in

All worldly things are illusory. Be free from their bondage

those three pounds of ashes. And still people are so attached to it. Glory be to God!

Musk deer and the immanence of God

"Once I spent a couple of months at Kailwar in the District of Arah. It is a very healthy place. Golap-Ma, Baburam's mother, Balaram's wife and others were with me. The country abounded in deer. A herd of them would roam about in the form of a triangle. No sooner had we seen them than they fled away like birds. I had never before seen anything running so swiftly. Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'Musk forms in the navel of the deer. Being fascinated with its smell, the deer run hither and thither. They do not know where the fragrance comes from. Likewise God resides in the human body, and man does not know it. Therefore he searches everywhere for bliss, not knowing that it is already in him.' God alone is real. All else is false. What do you say, my child?"

The Holy Mother had pimples all over her body. She said, "I have been suffering from this ailment for the last three years. I do not know for whose sins I have been suffering in this body. Otherwise how is it possible for me to get any disease?"

22nd August, 1918

It was evening when I went to see the Holy Mother. She was lying on a mat on the floor near her couch. I prostrated myself before her and asked her in the course of our conversation, "Mother, it is a

long time since I had been to our home at Kalighat. Should I go there now?"

Mother: Why don't you stay here for a few days more? Once you go to Kalighat you will not be able to come here so frequently. If you fail to come for one day, I become very anxious. You were not here yesterday. I was worried to think that you might be unwell. If you had failed to come to-day, I would have sent someone to inquire about you. But if your husband be ailing, or if you think that he wants your presence there, then you must have to go to Kalighat.

When I told her that there was no such difficulty, and that all I feared was popular criticism for staying too long with my sister, she asked me not to mind it and advised me to stay on at Calcutta for a month more.

A Brahmachari came up and said to the Mother that a certain woman devotee wanted to see her. The Mother was dead tired and lay on her bed. She was evidently annoyed and said, "Dear me! I am to see another person! I shall die!" She sat on her bed. A little later, a well-dressed lady entered the room and bowed down to her, touching the Mother's feet with her head.

"You could salute from a distance," said the Mother. "Why do you touch the feet?" The Mother asked her about her welfare.

Devotee: You know, Mother, that my husband has been ailing for some time past.

Mother: Yes, I have heard of that. How is he now? What is the trouble with him? Who is treating him?

Devotee: He has been suffering from diabetes. His feet have swollen. The doctors say that it is a dangerous disease. But I do not care for their opinions. You must cure him, Mother. Please say that he will be cured.

Mother: I do not know anything, my child. The Master is everything. If he wills, your husband will be all right. I shall pray to the Master for him.

Devotee: I am now very happy, Mother. Sri Ramakrishna can never disregard your prayer.

She began to weep, putting her head on the feet of the Holy Mother.

The Mother consoled her and said, "Pray to the Master. He will cure your husband. What is his diet now?"

Devotee: He takes Luchi and such other things as prescribed by the physician.

She soon took leave of the Holy Mother and went to see Swami Saradananda.

"I am burning day and night with the pain and misery of others," said the Mother, and took off the cloth from her body. I was about to rub her body with the medicated oil when a relative of the lady devotee who had just left, entered the room to salute her. She had to get up again. No sooner had he left the room than the Holy Mother lay down again and said, "Let anybody come. Whoever he may be,

I am not going to get up again. What a trouble it is, my child, to get up again and again with my aching feet! Besides, I feel the burning sensation on my whole back due to pimples. Please rub the oil well."

As I was rubbing the oil, the talk turned on the lady who had left. The Mother said, "Her husband is so dangerously ill. She has come here to pray to God for his recovery. Instead of being prayerful and penitent, she has covered herself with perfumes. Does it become one who comes to a shrine? Ah! such is the nature of your modern people!"

As I was going to take leave of her, the Mother asked someone to give me Prasada.

23rd August, 1918

I went to see the Mother in the evening. Referring to a woman devotee, she was saying, "She imposes very strict discipline upon her daughter-in-law. She should not go to such excess. Though she has to keep an eye upon her, she should also give her a little freedom. She is only a young girl. Naturally she likes to enjoy some nice things. If the lady becomes over-strict, she may go away from home or even commit suicide. What can she do then?" Looking at me, she said, "She had painted her feet a little. Is it a crime to do so? Alas! she cannot even see her husband. The husband has become a monk. I saw my husband with my own eyes, nursed him,

cooked for him and went near him whenever he permitted me."

Spiritual practice and realization of God

Another day I had been to the Holy Mother's place, when a monk came and prostrated before her. He said, "Mother, why does the mind become so restless every now and then? Why can't I constantly meditate on you? Many worthless thoughts disturb my mind. Useless things we can easily obtain if we simply want them. Shall I never realize the Lord? Mother, please tell me how I can attain peace. Nowadays seldom have I visions. What is the use of this life if I cannot realize Him? It is better to die than to lead such a worthless life."

Mother: What are you talking of, my child? Do not even think of such things. Can one have the vision of God every day? Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Does an angler catch a big carp every day the moment he sits with his rod? Arranging everything about him, he sits with the rod and concentrates. Once in a while a big carp swallows the hook. Many a time he is disappointed. Don't relax the practices for that reason. Do more Japa (repetition of the Name of God).

Yogin-Ma: Yes, that is true. The Name is identical with Brahman. Even if the mind be not concentrated at the outset, you will succeed ultimately.

Monk: Please tell me, Mother, how many times I should repeat the Name. That may help me to get concentration.

Mother: Ten thousand times, or even twenty thousand times, or as many times as you can.

Monk: One day, Mother, I was kneeling in the shrine and weeping, when I suddenly saw you standing by my side. You said to me, "What do you want?" "I want your grace, Mother," I replied, "as you bestowed it on king Suratha."[1] Then I added, "No, Mother, that was done by you as Durga. I do not care for that form. I want to see you as you are at present." With a smile you disappeared. My mind became all the more restless. Now nothing satisfies me. Often I think, "If I cannot realize Her, then what is the use of this life?"

Mother: Why are you so restless, my child? Why don't you stick on to what you have got. Always remember, "I have at least a Mother, if none else." Do you remember those words of Sri Ramakrishna? He said he would reveal himself to all that take shelter under him,—reveal himself at least on their last day. He will draw all unto Him.

Monk: I have been staying with a householder who is a great devotee. His wife comes from a very aristocratic family. She spends much money for me.

Mother: Ask her not to spend much money for you. The money of the devoted householders is for the benefit of the monks. Their money enables the

[1] The reference is to the story contained in the *Devimahatmya*, a great devotional text of the Mother cult, in which a king named Suratha and a merchant named Samadhi, both exiles from home and country, worship the Divine Mother and receive Her grace.

monks to stay at a place for four months together during the rainy season. It is very inconvenient for them to go out (at that time) for begging.

The monk prostrated himself before the Mother and left the room.

3rd September, 1918

Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna

I was in indifferent health for a few days. When I felt better, I went to see the Holy Mother one evening. In the course of conversation the Mother began to speak of Sri Ramakrishna.

Mother: (To me) What a good time of it we had had yesterday! Sarala read about Sri Ramakrishna. How fine his teachings were! How could we know then that things would take this turn! What a great soul was born! How many people are illumined by his words! He was the embodiment of Bliss itself. All the twenty-four hours of the day were devoted to devotional music, merriment, laughter, teaching and story-telling. So far as I remember, I never saw him worried by anything. Often he would tell me nice words of advice. If I had known how to write, I would have noted them down. Well, Sarala, please read something today.

Sarala began to read from the *Kathamrita*, the Bengali original of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

"Do you notice those words," said the Mother, "which he addressed to Rakhal's father,—'A good apple tree begets only good apples'? In this way he

would satisfy him. When he would come to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna would carefully feed him with delicious things. He was afraid lest he should take the boy away. Rakhal had a step-mother. When the father came there, he would say to Rakhal, 'Show him everything. Take good care of him.'"

Sarala was now reading about Brinde, the maid-servant. The Mother said, "She was by no means an easy woman. A fixed number of Luchis was set aside for her tiffin. She would be extremely abusive if that was found wanting. She would say, 'Look at these sons of gentlemen! They have eaten my share also. I do not get even a little of sweets.' Sri Ramakrishna was afraid lest those words should reach the ears of the young devotees. One day, early in the morning, he came to the Nahabat and said, 'Well, I have given to others Brinde's Luchis. Please prepare some for her. Otherwise she would indulge in abuses. One must avoid wicked persons.' As soon as Brinde came, I said to her, 'Well, Brinde, there is no tiffin for you to-day. I am just preparing Luchis.' She said, 'That's all right. Please do not take the trouble. You may give me raw food-stuffs.' I gave her flour, butter, potato and other vegetables."

After finishing a chapter, Sarala went away to attend on Golap-Ma who was ill.

The Holy Mother began to speak in a low voice:

The Monastic Ideal

"Do you notice this human body? Today it is and to-morrow it is not. And this world is full of misery and pain,

Why should one worry about taking another birth? The body is never free from its accompanying troubles! The other day Bilas said to me, 'Mother, we are to be always very alert. We always tremble with fear lest we should think any unholy thought.' That is very true. A monk is like a bleached cloth, and the householder is like a black one. One does not notice the spots in a black cloth so much, but even a drop of ink looks so prominent on white linen. The monk's life is always beset with dangers. The whole world is engrossed in lust and gold. The monk must always practise renunciation and dispassion. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'A monk must be always alert and careful.'"

Need of self-restraint in household life

In the meantime Harihar Maharaj came to the shrine for offering food. Pointing to him, the Mother said to me, "Look at this child who has renounced the world. He has left everything behind in the name of Sri Ramakrishna. The worldly men beget children without number, as if that is their only duty in this world. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'One must practise self-control after the birth of one or two children.' I have heard that the Englishman begets children according to the amount of his property. After the birth of the children they want, the husband and wife live separately, each one busy with his or her own work. And look at our race!"

The Mother continued with a smile, "Yesterday a young woman came to see me. She had a lot of

children, some hanging from her back and some clinging to her arms. She could hardly manage them. Can you imagine what she told me? She said, 'Mother, I do not at all enjoy this worldly life.' I said, 'How is that, my child? You have got so many young ones!' She replied, 'That is the end of it. I will not have them any more.' I said, 'It would be well if you could carry out your intention.'" The Mother began to laugh.

Devotee: Well, Mother, according to our Hindu conception, the husband is our most adorable Guru. The scriptures say that by serving him one can go to heaven, and even be united with God. Now if a wife, somewhat against the will of the husband, tries to practise self-control through prayer and spiritual pursuits, is she committing a sin?

Mother: Certainly not. Whatever you do for the realization of God cannot have any sinful effect. Self-control is absolutely necessary. All the hard disciplines enjoined upon Hindu widows are meant to help them practise self-control.

All the acts of Sri Ramakrishna were directed to God alone. He once performed the Shodasi Puja, making me the object of worship. I asked him what I should do with the bangles, the clothes and other articles of worship. After a little thought he said that I could give them all away to my mother. My father was then alive. Sri Ramakrishna said to me, "When you present your mother with these articles, don't think that she is an ordinary human being.

Think of her as the direct embodiment of the Divine Mother of the Universe." I acted accordingly. That was the nature of his teaching.

4th September, 1918

The Mother was seated on her meditation carpet, counting beads. The evening service was over. A woman devotee, a sister-in-law of the Mother, came there and said to her, " Please set my mind right. I am full of worries. I do not wish even to live for a day. I shall make a will and leave all my property to you. After my death, you execute my will." The Mother laughed and said, " When are you going to die ? " Suddenly she became grave and reprimanded her for her foolish thoughts, which she attributed to a heated brain and idle life.

Looking at me the Mother smiled and said: " Do you notice, my child, the inscrutable play of Sri Ramakrishna ? Look at my own relatives ! See the evil company I am in ! One is already mad and this one also is verging on insanity. And look at the third one ! How much care I took to train her up, but all to no effect! She does not have the slightest trace of wisdom. Look there. She is standing in the porch, leaning against the railing and wistfully looking forward to the return of her husband. She is afraid that her husband may enter the house where that music is going on. Day and night she has been trying to keep him within her sight. What an inordinate attachment !

I could never dream that she would be so much attached."

The woman relative of the Mother left the place with a sorrowful air and she lay down on her bed.

Mother: My child, you have been extremely fortunate in getting this human birth. Have intense devotion to God. One must work hard. How can one achieve anything without effort? You must devote some time for prayer even in the midst of the busiest hours of the day. I used to be very busy during my days at Dakshineswar; yet I did my prayer and meditation. . . . Let my sister-in-law, who complains of mental worry, do likewise. Let her get up from bed at 3 o'clock in the morning and sit in the porch adjoining my room for meditation. Let me see whether she can still have any worry of mind. She will not, however, do that, but only talk about her troubles! What is her suffering? I never knew, my child, what mental worry was. But now I have been suffering day and night for my relatives. It was an unlucky time when this sister-in-law came to our family; all my sufferings are due to my efforts to bring up her daughter Radhu. Let them all go away. I do not want anybody. Just look at these girls. They never listen to me. Such disobedient women!

Golap-Ma: Just see how they decorate their bodies! They think that is how they will get the love of their husbands.

Mother: Ah! how kindly Sri Ramakrishna treated me! Not even one day did he utter a word to wound my feelings. He would tell me, "One should always be active. One should never be without work. For when one is idle, all sorts of bad thoughts crop up in one's mind."

Control of mind and God-realization

My child, this mind is just like a wild elephant. It races with the wind. Therefore one should discriminate all the time. One should work hard for the realization of God. What a wonderful mind I had at that time! Somebody used to play on the flute at night at Dakshineswar. As I listened to the sound, my mind would be extremely eager for the realization of God. I thought the sound was coming directly from God, and I would enter into Samadhi. I experienced the same ecstasy at Belur also. The place was then very peaceful and I was constantly in a mood of meditation. Therefore Naren (Swami Vivekananda) intended to build a house there for me. The land on which this house stands was given by Kedar Das. But now the price of land has soared high; it is impossible to purchase a place now. All this has been done through the grace of God.

Just at that time, Maku, her niece, entered the room, with her child in her arms, and left the boy there, saying, "Mother, what shall I do? He does not sleep at all." The Mother said, "The child

has the quality of Sattva, therefore he does not sleep."

The Mother had been suffering terribly from the pain caused by pimples. At her bidding I rubbed her with medicated oil.

* * *

One day the Mother was seated upstairs in the northern porch of her house. She was still suffering terribly from pimples, which were persisting for so many days. She said that it was because of several devotees touching her and their sins being transferred to her in the form of illness. The conversation then turned to Sri Ramakrishna.

Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna

Mother: Once when Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at Cossipore, a few devotees brought some offerings for Mother Kali of Dakshineswar temple. On hearing that the Master was at Cossipore, they offered all the things they had brought before a picture of the Master,[1] and then partook of the Prasada. On hearing about this Sri Ramakrishna remarked, "All these things were brought for the great Mother of the Universe. And they have offered them all here (meaning himself)!" I was frightened very much at this and thought, "He is suffering from this dangerous disease. Who knows

[1] This incident happened at Dakshineswar. Some devotees brought different kinds of sweets for offering to Mother Kali. But instead of offering them to Mother Kali at the temple, they offered them before a picture of the Master.

what might happen?" What a calamity! Why did they do it?[1]

The Master too was referring to this incident again and again. Afterwards at a late hour in the night he said to me, "You will see how in course of time I will be worshipped in every house. You will see everyone accepting this (meaning himself). This is surely going to happen." This was the only day I heard him using the first personal pronoun with reference to himself. Usually he would speak of himself not as 'I' or 'me', but as 'case' or as 'belonging to this', pointing to his body.

After the Master's passing there was a quarrel as to who should get possession of some of the valuable things like his woollen wrapper, shawl and other garments. After all it is the devotees who would look upon them as invaluable possessions and preserve them for all time. And it was they who finally gathered them in a box and kept them in the drawing-room of Balaram Babu's house. But, O my daughter, who knew the Master's will! In Balaram Babu's house a servant stole away most of the things and either sold them or disposed of them in some other way. It was not proper to keep such things in the

[1] It is sacrilegious to offer to a man the gifts that are meant for the Deity, and hence this fear that it may bring about some misfortune. Sri Ramakrishna also seems to show this feeling at first in his mood as a humble devotee, but the subsequent part of the Conversation would show that worship of him is not improper if one understands his Divine aspect. It is indicative of the alternating moods of a devotee and of the Divinity that used to be on him.

drawing-room of a house. They ought to have been kept in the inner apartments of the house. What was left of those garments and other things of the Master, is now being preserved at the Belur Math.

My father-in-law (*i.e.* Sri Ramakrishna's father) was a pious and spirited Brahmin. He never received gifts from anyone. He even prohibited his people from accepting any gift brought to his house in his absence. But as regards my mother-in-law, if anyone made a private gift to her, she would accept it, cook it, offer it to the Deity, and then give it to others as Prasada. My father-in-law used to get angry if he happened to know it. He possessed a burning devotion. That was why the Master was born in his family.

A woman named Hari Dasi wanted to go on a pilgrimage to Navadvip. She did not, however, actually reach there, but stopped at Kamarpukur. She loved me very much. She was a woman of great faith. She kept with her some dust gathered from the Master's birth-place and would remark, "This is itself my Navadvip. Gauranga himself was born here. Why should I then go to Navadvip!" What a tremendous faith!

After the Master's passing, a Sadhu, hailing from Orissa, was staying at Kamarpukur. I used to give him rice, pulses and other necessaries. I used to visit him both morning and evening and ask, "Revered sir, how do you do?" Ah, with what great difficulty I built a thatched hut for him! Every day the sky

would be overcast with clouds, and it would seem as if it were going to rain just then. I would therefore pray with folded hands, " O Lord, wait a while, wait a while. Let me finish the cottage, and then let it rain in torrents if necessary." The people of the village helped me in the work by giving timber, straw and other necessary materials. Somehow the cottage was completed, but unfortunately it so happened that a few days after, the Sadhu passed away in that cottage.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that his body had come from Gaya. When his mother passed away, he asked me to offer Pindam (funeral cakes) at Gaya. I replied I was not entitled to perform those rites when the son himself was alive. The Master replied, " No, no, you are entitled to do it. Under no circumstances can I go to Gaya. If I go, do you think it will be possible for me to return[1] ? " So I did not want him to go there. And later on I performed the rites at Gaya.

28th September, 1918

It was morning when I went to the Udbodhan office. The Holy Mother was peeling fruits for worship. As soon as her eyes fell on me, she said, " I am so glad to see you here. It is the day of the

[1] Tradition has it that the birth of Sri Ramakrishna was heralded by the vision his father had at Gaya of the Deity who announced that He would be born as his son. Hence the spiritual association he had with Gaya was likely to overwhelm him if he went to that place.

Bodhan.[1] (I had entirely forgotten about it.) Please arrange these flowers for the worship of Sri Ramakrishna, and keep the fruit tray on this side." I obeyed her orders. I then combed her hair. While combing, a number of her hairs came out. The Mother said, "Here they are! Preserve these." I felt myself really blessed. I had a strong desire for some of her hairs.

Shyamadas Kaviraj, the celebrated physician, came to examine Radhu. When the examination was over, the Mother asked Radhu to bow before the physician. Radhu did as she was asked. After the physician had left the place, someone inquired, "Is the physician a Brahmin?"

Mother: No, he is a Vaidya.

Devotee: Why, then, did you ask Radhu to bow down before him?

Mother: Why should I not do so? The physician is so full of wisdom. He is equal to a Brahmin. To whom should one bow down if not before him? What do you say, my child?

30th September, 1918

It was the sacred day of the Mahashtami.[2] My sister and I arrived at the Udbodhan Office early in the morning. After a while, a few women devotees brought some flowers. They worshipped the Holy

[1] The day previous to the commencement of the Hindu festival, the Durga Puja.

[2] The second day of the Durga Puja which is considered very auspicious by the Hindus.

Mother and went to the Ganges for their bath. The Mother asked me, "Will you stay here today? It is the day of the Mahashtami, the second day of the Durga Puja." I answered in the affirmative. A few moments later, revered Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) came there to salute the Mother. We retired into the next room. The Mother was seated on her bed, with her feet resting on the ground. Many devotees came and bowed before her.

Later on, we went to take our bath in the Ganges in the company of Maku and other women devotees. The Mother said she would finish her bath at home, as rheumatism prevented her from bathing in the Ganges every day. After returning we saw many women devotees worshipping the Holy Mother. Many of them brought new cloths as offerings. After the worship, they wrapped the body of the Mother with the cloths, as they do with the image of Kali at Kalighat. Then she laid the cloths aside, one by one. To some devotees the Mother would say, "It is a nice piece of cloth."

A Brahmacharin came to the room and said that the men devotees would come now to bow down before the Mother. What an impressive sight! With flowers, full-blown lotuses and bel leaves in their hands, they came there one by one, and after worship and salutation, went away. Some time passed in this manner. The members of Balaram's family came and worshipped the Holy Mother. I was the last to go to her. After the worship I wrapped her

body with a cloth, when she said suddenly, "I will wear this cloth, as today I must put on a new one." She at once put on the cloth given by me. This brought tears in my eyes. After all, it was an ordinary piece of cloth. There were so many costly cloths around her. I was the poor daughter of the Mother. Her excessive affection for me made me bashful. The Mother said, "What a fine border this cloth has!"

A woman dressed in an ochre robe worshipped Mother and placed two rupees near her feet. The Mother said, "Goodness! Why should you do that? You have just put on the ochre robe. You have Rudraksha beads on your arm." The Mother asked her about her spiritual teacher. In reply the woman said that she had not been initiated. "Without initiation," said the Mother, "and without any spiritual realization, you have put on this sacred robe. This is not proper for you. The robe you have put on is very holy. I was about to salute you with folded hands. All will bow down at your feet. You must acquire the power to assimilate the honour." The woman said, "I have a desire to be initiated by you."

Mother: How is it possible!

But the woman insisted. Golap-Ma supported her. The Mother seemed to yield a little. She said, "We shall think about it."

Gauri-Ma came with the girls of her Ashrama. They all worshipped the Mother, took Prasada, and went away.

After finishing the worship in the shrine room, Bilas Maharaj came there and whispered to the Holy Mother, "I do not know, Mother, if Sri Ramakrishna has accepted the food-offering to-day. An impure leaf, carried by the wind, dropped on the food. Why was it so? Many devotees brought offerings from home. I do not know what has happened." The Mother asked if he had sprinkled the water of the Ganges over the food. He answered in the affirmative and went away. I felt troubled in mind to hear of this.

The worship of the Holy Mother went on in the same way. No sooner had one heap of flowers and bel leaves been removed, than a fresh pile was formed near her feet.

Her kindness to the poor

It was the time of the noonday worship, when a party of three men and women from a distant part of the country came to pay their respects to the Holy Mother. They were very poor, all their possessions consisting of one piece of cloth each. They begged their passage to Calcutta. One of the party—a man devotee—was having a private talk with the Mother. There seemed to be no end to the conversation. The time for the noonday worship was passing, and the Mother must perform it. The inmates of the Udbodhan Office became annoyed. One of them said to the devotee in unmistakable language, "If you have anything more to say, you had better come downstairs and talk to the senior

monks." But the Mother declared with some firmness, " It does not matter if it gets late. I must hear what they have to say." She continued to listen to him with great patience. In a whisper she gave him some instructions. Then she sent for his wife as well. We inferred that they must have experienced something in dream. Later on we came to learn that they had received some sacred Mantra in dream. After about an hour they took leave of the Mother. The Mother said, " Alas, they are very poor ! They have come here with great hardship."

After the noonday worship, we had our meal. The Holy Mother now wanted to have a little rest, and we retired into the adjoining room.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. After the worship in the shrine, Rashbehari Maharaj said, " An European lady has come to pay her respects to you. She has been waiting for a long time." The Mother asked him to bring the lady to her. As she bowed down before the Mother, the latter clasped her hand as one does in shaking hands. The words of the Master, that one should behave according to time and circumstance, were verified in this instance. Then she kissed the lady by touching the chin. The latter knew Bengali and said, " I hope I have not inconvenienced you by this visit. I have been waiting for a long time downstairs to see you. I am in great difficulty. My only daughter, a very good girl, is dangerously ill; so I have come here to crave your favour and blessings. Please be gracious to her, so

that she may be cured. She is such a nice girl. I praise her because one seldom finds, now-a-days, a good woman among us. I can vouch that many of them are wicked and evil-minded; but my daughter is of quite a different nature. Please be kind to her."

Mother: I shall pray for your daughter. She will be cured.

The European lady was much encouraged by this assurance from the Holy Mother and said, "When you say that she will be cured, she shall be cured. There is no doubt about it." She spoke these words thrice with great faith and emphasis. The Mother, with a kindly look, said to Golap-Ma, "Please give her a flower from the altar. Bring a lotus." Golap-Ma brought a lotus with a sacred bel leaf. The Mother took the lotus in her hand and closed her eyes for a few moments. Then she looked wistfully at the image of Sri Ramakrishna and gave the flower to the lady, saying "Please touch your daughter's head with it." She accepted the flower with folded hands and bowed down before the Mother. "What shall I do with the flower after that?" she asked.

Golap-Ma: When it is dried, throw it into the Ganges.

Lady: No, no! This belongs to God. I cannot throw it away. I shall make a bag out of a new piece of cloth and preserve the flower in it. I shall touch my daughter's head and body every day with it.

Mother: Very well, do that.

Lady: God is the supreme Reality. He exists. I want to tell you something. A few days ago, a baby was bed-ridden with fever in my house. With great fervour I prayed to God, "O Lord! I feel that you exist, but I want an actual demonstration." I wept and laid my handkerchief on the table. After a long time I was surprised to find three sticks in its folds. I gently touched the body of the baby thrice with the three sticks. Soon it was cured of the fever.

As she narrated the incident, tear drops trickled down her cheeks. She said, "I have taken much of your valuable time. Please forgive me." "No," said the Mother, "I am greatly pleased to talk to you. Come here again on Tuesday." The lady bowed down and took leave of her.

When I went to the Mother a few days after, I learnt that the European lady went to see her on Tuesday. The Mother had shown her special favour and initiated her. Her daughter, too, was cured of her illness.

24th March, 1920

The Holy Mother had been staying in her country home at Jayrambati. After about a year she returned in spring to Calcutta. She was extremely unwell, having been in the grip of malarial fever for a long time. I prostrated myself before her, and she blessed me by placing her hand on my head. She asked me how I was. I offered her a little money for her expenses, and she accepted it. At the sight of her

emaciated body. I lost all power of speech. I looked at her face wistfully and thought, "Alas, how pale and weak her body is!" My sister's maidservant was with me. She was about to touch the Mother's feet in salutation, but she said to her, "You may bow from a distance." The maid bowed from near the door-sill and went away.

The Mother was so weak that she felt it painful even to utter a word. I was seated on the floor. In the meantime, Rashbehari Maharaj came up and asked me not to talk much with her; but the Mother now and then asked me about various things. I gave her very short replies. Then Radhu came with her child. I took him in my arms and gave him some cash as a present. Radhu insisted on his not accepting it. The Mother said, "What is this, Radhu? She is your sister. Why should you not accept the present when she gives it with so much love?" The Mother accepted the money herself. She felt so sorry for the sufferings of the child caused by his mother's and grandmother's negligence. Radhu protested in bitter words. The Mother said, "There is no use talking to her", and kept quiet. After a while Sarala and a few women devotees came there to see the Mother. She was lying in bed. She began talking with them.

* * *

30th March, 1920

I went to pay my respects to the Holy Mother after five or six days. She had no fever for the past

two or three days, but she was much worried on account of Radhu and her incapacity to look after her little child. Moreover, today Radhu's hand had bumped against an iron railing, and with the swollen hand dressed in a dirty linen soaked in castor oil, she came to the Mother's room to consult Dr. Kanjilal who had come to examine the Mother.

After Radhu's hand was properly dressed, the Mother lay down on her bed, and asked me to rub her feet. While rubbing I asked her whether I could question her about something, and if it would inconvenience her.

Mother: No, not at all. Speak what you have to.

On spiritual practices and experiences

I spoke to her about some experience I had, and at this the Mother remarked, "Ah, my daughter, can one experience such delight every day? Everything is real. Nothing is untrue. The Master is all—He is Prakriti, He is Purusha. Through Him you will achieve everything."

Disciple: Mother, one day while doing Japa with great concentration, a long period of time passed quite unobserved. I had therefore to get up for attending to my household duties without carrying out the other items of spiritual practices that you had instructed me to do. Was it wrong on my part to have done so?

Mother: No, no. There is nothing wrong in it.

Disciple: Someone told me that while meditating at the dead of night, he hears a mystic sound.

Generally he experiences it as coming from the right side of the body ; sometimes, when the mind is working on a lower plane, it comes also from the left side.

Mother (after thinking a while) : Indeed, the sound comes from the right side. Only when there is body-consciousness it comes from the left side. Such things happen when the power of the Kundalini is awakened. The sound that comes from the right side is the real one. In time the mind itself becomes the Guru. To pray to God and meditate on Him for even two minutes with full concentration is better than doing so for long hours without it.

I did not feel inclined to question the Mother on the significance of ' body-consciousness ', for the Mother was not doing well.

I was about to take leave. Instantly the Mother raised her head from the pillow and said, " Well, my daughter, I have raised my head." She did so, because it is not the custom for a devotee to bow down to one lying. When I bowed down, she said " Come again. Come a little earlier in the evening. Can't you finish your household duties a little earlier and come ? "

Then uttering the name of Durga as a prayer for my safety, she bade me adieu. Even after I had come to the verandah, I heard her uttering the name of Durga in a compassionate tone. What an unbounded love ! So long as we are by her, we forget all the sorrows and sufferings of worldly life.

The Mother's illness showed no signs of improvement. Her body was getting weaker and weaker. I went to see her one afternoon. She was about to go for her evening wash. She asked me to help her to get up. She said, " I am getting fever very often, and the body has become very weak."

14th March, 1920

The evening Aratrika (service) in the shrine was over. The Mother had fever. Rashbehari Maharaj was rubbing her hands and Brahmachari Varada her feet. They were taking her temperature, and the Mother was lying with her eyes closed. I stood by her side. Once the Mother asked, " Who is there ? " Rashbehari Maharaj replied to her in a low voice. I heard that the temperature was 100·1 degrees.

Sister Sudhira was giving a treat to the girls of the Nivedita School, as it was the New Year's day. So Sarala, the disciple who was attending on the Mother, had gone to the school. The Mother asked Brahmachari Varada to bring Sarala from there ; for she had to feed Radhu's child. It was not yet time to feed the child but as he was weeping, Radhu wanted to feed him just then. The Mother tried to dissuade her. This only enraged Radhu who began to abuse the Mother. She said, " May you die, and I shall light your funeral pyre ! " We were deeply pained to hear this. The Mother was so badly ill, and Radhu was abusing her in such a fashion at that time ! Radhu, however, went on shouting out many more

abusive words. Such conduct on her part was quite frequent. The Mother, who had unbounded patience, would put up with such behaviour on all occasions. But this time, due to her protracted illness she too got annoyed and remarked, " You will realize the consequences of this afterwards! What a sad plight you will be in after my death, you will understand! I do not know how many kicks and thrashings with broom-stick are in store for you! "

At this Radhu became still more irritated and abusive. After a time Sarala arrived and fed the child. The experiences of that day cast a gloom over my mind. The Mother asked me to rub her feet.

Just then Rashbehari Maharaj entered the room and began to fit up the mosquito netting. So I took leave of her and the Mother said by way of bidding farewell, " Come." This was the last command and the last word that I heard from her.

I had to go to Kalighat that day. Afterwards for several days I could get no opportunity to visit her, due to the illness of many at home and other difficulties. I used to get regular information about her health, and came to know that she was sinking day by day. At the earliest opportunity I went to see her, my heart filled with the fear that we are to lose our most precious possession in life very soon. I was, however, still hoping against hope.

CHAPTER XXI

CONVERSATIONS: SECOND SERIES

(Being pages from the diary of a monastic disciple)

JAYRAMBATI

Year 1909

UNCLE Varada said to me, "The Mother has sent for you."

I went inside the inner apartment and found the Holy Mother standing at the door of her room waiting for me. As I saluted her, she asked, "Where do you come from?" I told her the name of the district of my native village.

Mother: I suppose you are now reading the teachings of the Master.

I did not reply to these words. She spoke to me as if we had known each other for a long time. I still remember her tender and affectionate look.

Mother: Do you belong to the Kayastha caste?

Disciple: Yes.

Mother: How many brothers have you?

Disciple: Four.

Mother: Sit down and take some refreshments.

With these words the Mother spread a small carpet on the floor of the verandah and gave me some Luchis and sweets that had been offered in the shrine on the previous night.

I told the Mother that I had walked all the way from Tarakeswar on the previous day, spending the night in the village of Deshra, to the northwest of Jayrambati, in the house of a young man whom I had met at the railway station of Haripal. The Mother listened to all this and said to me, after I had finished my refreshments, 'Don't bathe now; you have walked a great deal.' Then she gave me a betel leaf to chew.

She sent for me again after the noonday worship. After the offerings were over, she first of all served me food. She served it with her own hands, on a Shal leaf, on the porch of her room. "Eat well, and, remember, don't feel shy!" she said to me as I was enjoying the meal. Afterwards she gave me a betel leaf.

I went to the Holy Mother again at three or four o'clock in the afternoon and found her kneading dough for bread. She was seated on the floor, facing the east, her legs stretched out in front of her. The oven stood near her. Casting a benign glance upon me, she said, "What do you want?"

Disciple: I want to talk to you.

Mother: What do you want to talk about? Sit down here.

She gave me a seat.

Disciple: Mother, people say that our Master is God Eternal and Absolute; what do you say?

Mother: Yes, he is God Eternal and Absolute to me.

As she had said 'to me', I went on, "It is true that to every woman her husband is God Eternal and Absolute. I am not asking the question in that sense."

Mother: Yes, he is God Eternal and Absolute to me as my husband, and in a general way as well.

Then I thought that if Sri Ramakrishna were God Eternal, then she, the Holy Mother, must be the Divine Power, the Mother of the Universe. She must be identical with His divine consort. She and he are like Sita and Rama, Radha and Krishna. I had come to the Holy Mother, cherishing this faith in my heart. I asked her, "If that be the case, then why do I see you preparing bread like an ordinary woman? It is Maya, I suppose, is it not?"

Mother: It is Maya, indeed! Otherwise, why should I fall into such a state? But God loves to sport as a human being. Sri Krishna was born as a cowherd boy and Rama as the child of Dasaratha.

Disciple: Do you ever remember your real nature?

Mother: Yes, I recall it now and then. At that time I say to myself, "What is this that I am doing? What is all this about?" Then I remember the house, buildings and children (pointing with the palm of her hand to the houses) and forget my real self.

I used to visit the Mother almost daily in her room. She would lie down on her bed and talk to me, Radhu lying asleep by her side. An oil-lamp would cast a dim light in the room. On some days a maidservant rubbed her feet with medicated oil for rheumatism.

One day she said to me in the course of conversation, "Whenever the thought of a disciple comes to my mind and I yearn to see him, then he either comes here or writes a letter to me. You must have come here prompted by a certain feeling. Perhaps you have in your mind the thought of the Divine Mother of the Universe."

Disciple: Are you the Mother of all?

Mother: Yes.

Disciple: Even of these sub-human beings, birds and animals?

Mother: Yes, of these also.

Disciple: Then why should they suffer so much?

Mother: In this birth they must have these experiences.

One evening I had the following conversation with the Holy Mother in her room.

Mother: You all have come to me, because you are my own.

Disciple: Am I your 'own'?

Mother: Yes, my 'own'. Is there any doubt about it? If a man is the very 'own' of another, they remain inseparably connected in the successive cycles of time.

Disciple: All address you as Apani[1], but I cannot do so. I cannot utter that word. I address you as Tumi.

Mother: That is good, indeed. It denotes an intimate relationship.

In the course of our talk I said to her, "You must have taken the responsibilities of those whom you have initiated with the sacred Mantra. Then why do you say when we request you to fulfil a desire, 'I will speak to the Master about it'? Can't you take our responsibility?"

Mother: I have, indeed, taken your responsibility.

Disciple: Please bless me, O Mother, that I may have purity of mind and attachment to God. Mother, I had a classmate in school. I would be grateful if I could bestow upon Sri Ramakrishna a fourth of the love which I cherished for my chum.

Mother: Ah me! That is true, indeed! Well, I shall speak to the Master about it.

Disciple: Why do you only say that you will speak to the Master? Are you different from him? My desire will certainly be fulfilled by your blessings alone.

Mother: My child, if you can get perfect knowledge through my blessings, then I bless you with all my heart and soul. Is it ever possible for a man to

[1] *Apani*—There are three words in Bengali by which one can address another. *Apani* is used when a person addresses his superior entitled to respect. *Tumi* is used to address an equal and is a term of intimacy and endearment. *Tui* is used to address the inferiors, servants, etc.

free himself unaided from the clutches of Maya? It was for this that the Master performed spiritual austerities to the utmost extent and gave the results thereof for the redemption of mankind.

Disciple: How can one love Sri Ramakrishna without seeing him?

Mother: Yes, that's true. Can one ever have intimate relationship with a mere airy being!

Disciple: When shall I have the vision of the Master?

Mother: You shall certainly see him. You shall see the Master at the right time.

* * *

One day the Mother lay on her bed while Kamini, the maid, was rubbing her knee with some medicated oil for rheumatism. The Mother said to me, "The body is one thing and the soul another. The soul pervades the whole body; therefore I have been feeling the pain in my leg. If I should withdraw my mind from the knee, then I would not feel any pain there."

Referring to initiation by Mantra, I said to her,

The need of initiation

"Mother, what's the need of taking the Mantra from a teacher? Suppose a man does not repeat his Mantra; will it not do for him if he simply repeats, 'Mother Kali, Mother Kali'?"

Mother: The Mantra purifies the body. Man becomes pure by repeating the Mantra of God. Listen to a story. One day Narada went to Vaikuntha to

see the Lord and had a long conversation with Him. Narada had not, at that time, been initiated. After Narada left the place, the Lord said to Lakshmi, "Purify the place with cow-dung." "Why, Lord?" asked Lakshmi. "Narada is your great devotee. Why, then, do you say this?" The Lord said, "Narada has not, as yet, received his initiation. The body cannot be pure without initiation."

The place of mind in spiritual development

One should accept the Mantra from a Guru at least for the purification of the body. The Vaishnava, after initiating the disciple, says to him, "Now all depends upon your mind." It is said, "The human teacher utters the Mantra into the ear; but God breathes the spirit into the soul." Everything depends upon one's mind. Nothing can be achieved without purity of mind. It is said, "The aspirant may have received the grace of the Guru, the Lord and the Vaishnava; but he comes to grief without the grace of 'one'." That 'one' is the mind. The mind of the aspirant should be gracious to him.

Continuing, the Holy Mother said, "When the Master passed away, I also wanted to leave my body. He appeared before me and said, 'No, you must remain here. There are many things to be done.' I myself realized later on that this was true; I had so many things to do. The Master used to say, 'The people of Calcutta live like worms swarming in darkness. You will guide them.' He said that he

would live for three hundred years, in a subtle body, in the hearts of the devotees. He further said that he would have many devotees among white people.

"After the passing away of the Master, I was at first greatly frightened, for I used to put on a Sari with thin red borders and wear gold bangles on my wrist, which made me afraid of people's criticism.[1] Gradually I got rid of that fear. One day the Master appeared before me and asked me to feed him with Khichuri. I cooked the dish and offered it before Raghuvir[2] in the temple. Then I mentally fed the Master with it. . ."

About herself she said, "Balaram Babu used to refer to me as the 'great ascetic, the embodiment of forbearance'. Can you call him a man who is devoid of compassion? He is a veritable beast. Sometimes I forget myself in compassion. Then I do not remember who I am."

Finally the Holy Mother said to me, "I feel very free with you. See me in Calcutta and stay with me."

At that time I lived in the world with my people, though I had been cherishing an intense desire to embrace the monastic life. I said to myself, "Perhaps in future it will be possible for me, through her grace, to be a monk and live near her."

[1] Hindu widows, according to traditional custom, are required to put on a white Sari without any border and to give up all ornaments. The Mother at first wanted to follow this custom of Hindu widows, but Sri Ramakrishna appeared in a vision and told her not to do so as he was not really dead.

[2] The tutelary Deity of Sri Ramakrishna's family at Kamarpukur.

When I was in Jayrambati, Radhu's mother, Surabala, was mentally deranged. She had taken to her father's house all the jewelleries of her daughter Radhu. Taking advantage of her insane condition, her father snatched away those jewelleries. That made her even more distracted. On her return to Jayrambati, Radhu's mother wept in the temple of Simhavahini, praying for the jewelleries. It was dusk. I was talking to the Holy Mother in her room when suddenly she said to me, "My child, I must go now. That crazy sister-in-law of mine has none else to call her own but myself. She is weeping before the Deity for the jewelleries." With these words, the Mother left the room. But I could not hear any sound of weeping, nor was it possible to do so at such a distance; yet she had recognized the voice. She returned with Radhu's mother. The latter said to her, "O sister-in-law, you have put away my jewelleries. You have deprived me of them." The Mother said, "Had these ornaments belonged to me, then I would have thrown them away at once like the filth of a crow." Referring to Radhu's mother, she said to me, laughing, "Girish used to say that she was my mad companion."

At first I used to hesitate to address the Holy Mother as "Mother". My own mother had died during my childhood. One morning the Holy Mother sent me to a certain person on an errand. As I was about to leave, she asked me, "What will you say to him?" I said, "Why? I shall say to him, 'She

asked me to tell you, etc.'" "No, my child," said the Holy Mother, "tell him, 'The *Mother* asked me to tell you.'" She emphasized the word '*Mother*'.

One morning I was reading aloud to the Mother and several devotees on the porch of her room. I was reading a life of Sri Ramakrishna entitled *Ramakrishna Punthi* written in verse. In the chapter on her marriage with Sri Ramakrishna, the author eulogized her greatly and referred to her as the 'Mother of the Universe'. As I read that passage, the Mother left the porch. A few minutes earlier I had read to her some pages from the *Udbodhan*, in which had been published a portion of the Kathamrita by M. No one else was present then. I had been reading the following passage:

Girish: I have a desire.
Master: What is it?
Girish: I want love of God for the sake of love.
Master: That kind of love is possible only for the Isvarakotis. Ordinary men cannot achieve it.

I asked the Holy Mother, "What does the Master mean by that?"

Divine love and Isvarakotis

Mother: The Isvarakotis have all their desires fulfilled in God (Purna-Kama). Therefore they have no worldly desires. Love for the sake of divine love is not possible so long as a man has any desire.

Disciple: Mother, do your own brothers belong to the same level as these Isvarakotis?

I thought that as they were her brothers, they must have the same spiritual capacities as the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. At this the Mother simply looked scornfully, as if she were going to say, "What a comparison! What can one achieve by simply being my brother? To be the intimate disciple of the Master is quite a different thing!"

One morning, the Holy Mother was assisting in husking paddy. It was almost her daily job. I asked her, "Mother, why should you work so hard?" "My child," said she in reply, "I have done much more than is necessary to make my life a model."

One night, all were asleep in the house of the Holy Mother when the husband of Nalini, a niece of the Holy Mother, arrived there unexpectedly with a bullock cart to take Nalini to his house. Nalini had returned from her husband's place and did not want to go back. Hearing of her husband's intention, Nalini shut the door of her room and threatened suicide if her husband forced her to go back with him. The Holy Mother, however, assured her that she would not have to go back with her husband and she opened the room. There was confusion in the family for the whole night and the Holy Mother sat through the night on the porch of Nalini's room. She put out the lamp at dawn and repeated to herself, "Ganga, Gita, Gayatri, Bhagavata, Bhakta, Bhagavan, Ramakrishna!"

One day the Holy Mother sent me with an old servant of the family to Pagli's (the mad

sister-in-law's) father to persuade him either to come to Jayrambati or to return the ornaments he had taken from his daughter. After a great deal of persuasion he accompanied us but did not bring the ornaments with him. The Mother begged him to return them and thus free Pagli from her mental agony; but the greedy Brahmin turned a deaf ear to her request.

I intended to return home on the day before the Sivaratri, as I wanted to attend the Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration at Belur Math, which came off two days after the Sivaratri. I told the Mother about it. She asked me to go to Kamarpukur first. I had left home with a great yearning to see the Holy Mother alone, and in my eagerness I had forgotten to take my umbrella or an extra piece of cloth. At the request of the Mother, I agreed to visit the birth-place of the Master. She gave me a fresh piece of cloth to put on, and asked me to take it with me.

Mother: Have you any money with you? You will require carriage hire. Take the money from me.

Disciple: I have money with me. I have not to take it from you.

Mother: Write to me after you reach home. Ah, I could not feed my son properly. I could not prepare anything good for him. This was because at that time there was great confusion in the family on account of Nalini and Pagli.

I prostrated myself before her and set out with tears in my eyes. The Holy Mother accompanied

us for some distance and then watched us till we disappeared. I could not refrain from weeping out of devotion for her till I had reached Kamarpukur.

After my arrival at Kamarpukur, I was shown the room where the Holy Mother had lived. There I saw a picture of the Mother, which made me still more restless to see her again. Next day M.[1] and Prabodh Babu went to Jayrambati via Kamarpukur, halting at the latter place for a few hours. In the evening, Lalit Babu, a disciple of the Mother, arrived there, dressed in turban, trousers and long toga. He was on his way to Jayrambati. As it would be difficult for me to go from Jayrambati to Calcutta alone, some devotees suggested that I might revisit Jayrambati and go to Calcutta in the company of Lalit Babu. So I went with him to Jayrambati once again, and said to the Mother, "I am here again." The Mother was greatly pleased and said, "That's very good. You can go to Calcutta with Lalit."

After the Sivaratri festival was over, the devotees sat down for their meal. They were served some Prasada on leaf-plates. I asked them what it was. They said that it was the Prasada of the Holy Mother. I also partook of it. Later on, I said to the Mother, "They all enjoyed your Prasada. But you never offered it to me." "My child," said the Mother, "you never asked for it. How could I suggest it?" What great humility!—I thought.

[1] Mahendra Nath Gupta, the author of the *Kathamrita* or *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.*

The next day, Lalit Babu was sent in a palanquin to get Radhu's ornaments from her grandfather. Lalit posed as a Government official and carried a letter with him supposed to have been written by a high police officer of Calcutta. The Holy Mother asked M. to accompany Lalit Babu lest the latter, a young man, should use insulting language when speaking to the old Brahmin. However, he succeeded in bringing Radhu's grandfather with the ornaments to Jayrambati in the afternoon. At about two o'clock in the morning, we heard that the Mother was spending a sleepless night. She was feeling nervous. M. and I entered the inner apartments. While all were looking for medicines, I asked the Mother the cause of her ailment. She said, " After they had left to fetch the ornaments, I felt worried and feared that they might insult the old Brahmin. That made me nervous." I was amazed to see the compassion of the Mother for the Brahmin who was at the root of all these troubles.

The next afternoon I left with the party for Calcutta. The Mother had told Lalit Babu about me, " He is very devoted to God. Please take him with you." We all prostrated ourselves before the Mother. Her eyes became filled with tears. She was moved to tears as she accompanied us to the outer gate of the house. At Vishnupur, on our way to Calcutta, M., Prabodh Babu and others visited the shrine of Mrinmayi, an aspect of the Divine Mother. But Lalit Babu and I directly went to the Railway Station

and boarded the train. M. sent Prabodh Babu to request us also to visit the shrine, but we did not care to see Mrinmayi (lit. made of earth) as we had seen Chinmayi (a living Goddess). I arrived at the Belur Math and after witnessing Sri Ramakrishna's birthday festival, returned home.

UDBODHAN OFFICE, CALCUTTA

Year 1909

Next winter I came to Calcutta to pay my respects to the Holy Mother. On the first day I went to see her, she was still staying at the house of Balaram Bose, but by the time of my second visit, she had shifted to her newly constructed house in Calcutta (*i.e.*, the Udbodhan Office). On entering the house, I saw Doctor Kanjilal reading a newspaper. In answer to my query he said, "The Mother had an attack of pox. She has not yet completely recovered. You may see her after two weeks." I had not been aware of her illness. Swami Saradananda said to me, "Come tomorrow; you may see her then. Also take your meal here." When I came the next day, the Mother showed me the pox marks. Most of them had disappeared. Through her blessings and the arrangement made by Swami Saradananda, I was staying in the Belur Math. On being informed of this, the Holy Mother said to me, "That's good. He has fallen a victim to the influence of monastic life. Live in the Belur Math. May you get love for the Master! You have my blessings."

I used to take milk for the Mother now and then from the Belur Math. That would also give me the opportunity to pay my respects to her. One day, while entering her house with milk, I saw her preparing betel leaf assisted by Nalini, her niece. Seeing me, Nalini was about to leave the room. The Mother checked her and said, "Don't go away. He is my child. Sit here." In the course of conversation, she referred to the relatives of Maku's husband (Maku was another niece), and said, "I have to take special care of them, otherwise they feel offended and hiss. But you are my children. You are satisfied with whatever I do for you. You do not mind if I cannot always show you attention. But those relatives feel very much offended if I do not give them the best of everything, or if I fail in the least in attending to them." After a while I asked her, "Mother, how does one get purity of mind and yearning for God?"

Mother: Oh! You will certainly have these. As you have taken refuge in the Master, you will achieve all. Pray to him sincerely.

Disciple: I can't do it. Please do pray for me.

Mother: I always pray to Sri Ramakrishna to make your mind pure and holy.

Disciple: Yes, Mother, I shall have everything if you but pray for me.

After a few months I was sent to Ghatal, not very far from Jayrambati, to give relief to the flood-stricken people of that place. I took leave for three

days and visited the Holy Mother at Jayrambati on the occasion of the Jagaddhatri Puja. Atul was with me. This was his first visit to the Mother. We went to Jayrambati through Kamarpukur and as soon as we reached her home, Ashu Maharaj, an attendant of the Holy Mother, said, " It is nice that you have come. The Mother has been sad because of not seeing any devotee for some time past." The Mother asked us to stay for meal and fed us sumptuously. Early next morning we had to return to the relief work. While taking leave of the Mother, I said to her, " I shall come again." Atul said, like a school-boy, " Please remember."

After finishing the relief work at Ghatal, I again returned to Jayrambati. It was winter. On reaching the house of the Holy Mother in the evening, I found her seated on the porch applying medicine to her leg. She was suffering from rheumatic pains in her knees.

Disciple: What is this medicine?

Mother: Someone suggested this leaf. Have you been starving for the whole day?

Disciple: No, but I have not taken any food on the way.

Mother: Why did you not buy some refreshments? There are stores on the way.

I had with me only a rupee which I had saved to make an offering at Belur Math. However, I did not tell her about it. She served me with a hot meal which I ate heartily. She gave me a blanket and asked me to use it during the night. I asked

her, "Whose is this blanket?" She told me, "It is mine. I use it myself."

The next day's mail brought a letter to her from one of my brothers, requesting her to persuade me to return home. Though short, the letter was written in a good style and contained beautiful sentiments. The Mother said, "Ah! what a nice letter!" Then she said, addressing me, "Why don't you return home? Live in the world, earn money and bring up a family." She was testing me. "But, Mother," said I, "please do not say that."

I began to weep. The Mother then said to me with great tenderness, "My child, please do not weep. You are a living God. Who is able to renounce all for His sake? Even the injunctions of Destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God. Destiny strikes off with her own hand what she has written about such a person. What does a man become by realizing God? Does he get two horns? No. What happens is, he develops discrimination between the real and the unreal, gets spiritual consciousness, and goes beyond life and death. God is realized in spirit. How else can one see God? Has God talked to anybody devoid of ecstatic fervour? One sees God in spiritual vision, talks to Him, and establishes relationship with Him in spirit."

Renunciation and God-realization

Disciple: No, Mother. There is something else besides. One gets a direct vision of the spirit.

Mother: That Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) alone had. The Master kept with himself the key to Narendra's liberation. What else is spiritual life besides praying to the Master, repeating his name, and contemplating on him? (With a smile) And the Master? What is there after all in him? He is our own eternally!

Disciple: Mother, please see that I realize the right thing—just that Sri Ramakrishna is *our own*!

Mother: Must I repeat it? (Firmly) You will certainly realize it. Certainly.

* * *

Reasoning and God-realization

It was the evening of the following day. I was talking to the Mother in her room. She was lying on her bed. The conversation drifted to the Vedanta. I said to her, "Nothing exists in the world except name and form. It cannot be proved that matter exists. Therefore the conclusion is that God and such other things do not exist."

My idea was that such things as the Master and the Holy Mother were also illusory. She at once understood my thought and said, "Narendra once said to me, 'Mother, the knowledge that explains away the lotus feet of the Guru is nothing but ignorance. What is the validity of knowledge if it proves that the Guru is naught?' Give up this dry discussion, this hodge-podge of philosophy. Who has been able to know God by reasoning? Even Siva and sages like Suka and Vyasa are like big ants at the most."

Disciple: I want to know. I understand a little too. How can one stop reasoning?

Mother: Reasoning does not disappear as long as one has not attained to perfect knowledge.

I asked her about Japa and other spiritual practices. The Mother said, "Through these spiritual disciplines the ties of past Karma are cut asunder. But realization of God cannot be achieved without ecstatic love (Prema Bhakti) for Him. Do you know the significance of Japa and other spiritual practices? By these, the power of the sense-organs is subdued."

Japa, sense-control and God-realization

Referring to Lalit Chatterjee who had been dangerously ill, the Mother said, "Lalit used to give me great financial help. He would take me out in his carriage. He gives much for the Divine service in the shrines at Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. My Lalit has a heart worth a million rupees! There are again people who are miserly in spite of their wealth. The rich should serve God and His devotees with money, and the poor worship God by repeating His Name."

Charity

Referring to ecstatic love, the Mother said, "Did the cowherd boys of Brindavan get Sri Krishna as their 'own' through Japa or meditation? They realized Him through ecstatic love. They used to say to Him, as to an intimate friend, 'Come here, O Krishna! Eat this! Take this!'"

Ecstatic love and God-realization

Disciple: How can one yearn for God without seeing the manifestation of His love?

Mother: Yes, you can do so. There lies the grace of God.

JAYRAMBATI

December, 1909

It was about nine n the morning. The Holy Mother had been preparing betel-leaves when I came to see her. Soon we were engaged in conversation.

Disciple: Mother, I have seen and heard so much; still I cannot recognize you as my 'own mother'.

Mother: Otherwise why should you come here so often? You will know your 'own mother' in proper time!

After a while I said to her, referring to my own parents and brothers, "My parents brought me up. I do not know where they are now (after their death), or how they live. Please give your blessings that my brothers may have good tendencies."

Mother: Do most people ever want God? There are so many people in this very family; but do all want the Lord?

After a few minutes she said to me, "Don't worry. Don't lead a married life. What should you fear if you are a celibate? Wherever you may live, you will be free."

Disciple: But, Mother, I have fear.

Mother: No, have no fear. All depends upon the will of the Master.

Disciple: The mind is the whole thing. If it be in a pure state, it does not matter where I live. Please see, Mother, that my mind always remains pure.

Mother: May it be so!

It was the birthday of the Holy Mother. A few days before, Prabodh Babu had come to Jayrambati and given five rupees to the brothers of the Holy Mother for special worship on her birthday. The Mother said to them, "You are not to do anything special today. I shall wear a new cloth; the Master will be worshipped with a sweet-offering and I shall partake of it later on. That's all for this occasion."

After the worship in the shrine, the Holy Mother sat on her couch with her feet hanging down. She had put on a new piece of cloth. Prabodh Babu offered some flowers at her feet. I stood on the porch near the door. The Mother said to me, "What? Won't you offer some flowers? Here they are. Take them." Then I also offered flowers at her feet. We enjoyed a sumptuous feast at midday and afterwards Prabodh Babu left for Calcutta; but as I was indisposed, I remained at Jayrambati.

December, 1909

Binding God

In the course of conversation, the Mother said, "Can you tell me whether anyone could bind God? Mother Yasoda could bind Krishna because He Himself allowed her

to do so. The cowherd boys and the milkmaids of Brindavan also realized God.

Desires and rebirth

"As long as a man has desires there is no end to his transmigration. It is the desires alone that make him take one body after another. There will be rebirth for a man if he has even the desire to eat a piece of candy. It is for this reason that a variety of food-stuffs are brought to Belur Math. Desire may be compared to a minute seed. It is like a big banyan tree growing out of a seed, which is no bigger than a dot. Rebirth is inevitable so long as one has desires. It is like taking the soul from one pillow-case and putting it into another; only one or two out of many men can be found who are free from all desires. Though one gets a new body on account of desires, yet one does not completely lose spiritual consciousness if one has to one's credit good merits from previous birth. A priest in the temple of Govinda in Brindavan used to feed his mistress with the food-offerings of the Deity. As a result of this sin, he got the body of a ghoul after his death. But he had served God in the temple. As a result of his merit, he one day appeared before all in his own physical body. It was possible for him to do so on account of his past good actions. He told people the cause of his inferior birth and said to them further, "Please arrange a religious festival and music for the redemption of my soul from this state. That will free me."

Disciple: Is it possible to be freed from such states through religious festivals and music?

Mother: Yes; that is enough for the Vaishnavas. They do not perform such obsequies as Sraddha and so forth.

Once I visited the image of Jagannath at Puri at the time of the Car Festival. I wept in sheer joy to see so many people having a view of the image of the Deity. 'Ah,' I said to myself, 'it is good. They will all be saved.' But later on I realized that it was not so. Only one or two who were absolutely free from desires could attain their salvation. When I narrated the incident to Yogin-Ma, she corroborated this by saying, 'Yes, Mother, only people who are free from desires attain liberation (Mukti).'

* * *

One morning, while taking my breakfast on the verandah of the Holy Mother's room, I asked her, "Mother, will I have to be initiated into Sannyasa if I am to live in Belur Math?"

Mother: Yes, my child.

Disciple: But, Mother, the monastic life begets a terrible vanity.

Vanity and monastic life

Mother: Yes, that is true. A monk may become very vain. He may think, 'See, he does not respect me. He does not bow down before me, and so on.' (Pointing to her own white cloth [1]) One should

[1] The white cloth is the symbol of the householder whereas the monks put on ochre clothes.

rather live thus (meaning possessed of inner renunciation). Gaur Siromani [1] took to the monastic life in his old age when his sense-organs had become dull. Is it possible, my child, to get rid of vanity—vanity of beauty, vanity of virtue, vanity of knowledge and vanity of a holy life?

The Holy Mother exhorted me to make ready for the life of renunciation. "Go home," said she, "and tell your brothers once and for all, 'I will not accept any job; I will not be a slave to anyone since my mother is dead; I will not do anything of that sort. You be happy with your householder's duties.'"

The Mother and I were engaged in conversation in the evening.

God-realization and Divine Grace

Disciple: Mother, one gets spiritual realization at any time if the grace of God descends on him. Then he does not have to wait for the right time.

Mother: That is true; but can the mango which ripens out of season be as sweet as the one which ripens in the month of Jaishtha, that is, the proper season? Men are trying to get fruits out of season. You see, nowadays one gets mangoes and jack-fruits even in the month of Asvin (autumn). But these are not as sweet as those found in the proper season. This is also true of the efforts that lead to God-realization. Perhaps you practise some Japa and austerities in this life; in the next life you may

[1] He was an outstanding holy man of the Vaishnava sect. He visited the Holy Mother in Brindavan.

intensify the spiritual mood and in the following life you advance further.

Referring to one's attaining spiritual realization suddenly, the Mother said, "God has the nature of a child. One man does not ask for it, yet He gives it to him, whereas another man asks for it and God will not give it to him. It is all His whim."

* * *

Another day while the Holy Mother was seated on her porch preparing betel-leaf, I said to her, "In future, how many will practise spiritual disciplines to propitiate you!" Mother said with a smile, "What do you say! All will say, 'Ah, the Mother had such a gout, she used to limp like this!'"

Disciple: You may say that.

Mother: That's good. That is why the Master used to say when he was lying ill at the Cossipore garden, "Those who came to me expecting some earthly gain have disappeared saying, 'Ah, he is an Incarnation of God! How can he be ill? This is all Maya.' But those who are my 'own', have been suffering a great deal in seeing this misery.' . . ."

UDBODHAN OFFICE, CALCUTTA

Year 1910

On the day previous to my initiation I said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, I want to be initiated."

Mother said, "Have you not been initiated?" I answered in the negative. "I thought that you had been initiated," she said. After initiating me, she blessed me, saying, "May your body and mind become pure by repeating the name of God!"

On doing Japa with fingers

Disciple: What is the need of repeating the Mantra with the fingers? Is it not enough to do so mentally?

Mother: God has given the fingers that they may be blessed by repeating His Name with them.

* * *

God and the problem of suffering

The Mother was engaged in a conversation with me in the morning.

Disciple: Mother, if there exists some being called God, why is there so much suffering and misery in the world? Does He not see it? Has He not the power to remove it?

Mother: The creation itself is full of misery and happiness. Could any one appreciate happiness if misery did not exist? Besides, how is it possible for all persons to be happy? Sita once said to Rama, "Why don't you remove the suffering and unhappiness of all your subjects? Please make all the inhabitants of your kingdom happy. If you only will, you can easily do it." Rama said, "Is it ever possible for all persons to be happy at the same time?" "Why not?" asked Sita. "Please supply from the royal treasury the means of satisfying everyone's wants." "All right," said Rama, "your will shall be carried

out." Rama sent for Lakshmana and said to him, "Go and notify everyone in my empire that whatever he wants he may get from the royal treasury." At this the subjects of Rama came to the palace and told their wants. The royal treasury began to flow without stint. When everyone was spending his days joyously, through the Maya of Rama the roof of the building in which Rama and Sita lived, started to leak. Workmen were sent for to repair the building. But where were workmen to be had? There was not a labourer in the kingdom. In the absence of masons, carpenters and artisans, all buildings went out of repair, and work was at a standstill. The subjects of Rama informed the king of their difficulties. Finding no other help, Sita said to Rama, "It is no longer possible to bear the discomfort of the leaking roof. Please arrange things as they were before. Then all will be able to procure workmen. Now I realize that it is not possible for all persons to be happy at the same time." "Let it be so," said Rama. Instantaneously all things were as before and workmen could once more be engaged. Sita said to Rama, "Lord, this creation is your wonderful sport!"

No one can suffer for all time. No one will spend all his days on this earth in suffering. Every action brings its own result, and one gets one's opportunities accordingly.

Disciple: Is everything then due to Karma?

Mother: If not, to what else? Don't you see the scavenger carrying the tub on his head?

Disciple: Where does one first get the propensity which leads him to an action, good or bad? You may say, as an explanation of the propensities of this life, that they are due to the actions of the previous life, and the propensities of that life to the preceding one. But where is the beginning?

The mystery of Karma and Divine will

Mother: Nothing can happen without the will of God. Not even a straw can move. When a man passes into a favourable time, he gets the desire to contemplate on God. But when the time is unfavourable, he gets all the facilities for doing evil actions. Everything happens in time according to the will of God. It is God alone who expresses His will through the actions of man. Could Naren (Swami Vivekananda) by himself have accomplished all those things? He was able to succeed because God worked through him. The Master has predetermined what he is going to accomplish. If anyone surrenders himself totally at his feet, then the Master will see that everything is set right. One must bear with everything, because all our facilities are determined by actions (Karmas). Again, actions can be cancelled by actions.

Disciple: Can action ever cancel action?

Mother: Why not? If you do a good action, that will counteract your past evil action. Past sins can be counteracted by meditation, Japa and spiritual thought.

Spiritual practice can remove sins

I had heard that a boy in the Mirzapur Street was possessed by a ghost. Some members of the Udbodhan Office had visited the boy yesterday. I asked the Mother, "How long does one live in the spirit body?"

Mother: All people, excepting highly evolved souls, live in the spirit body for a year. After that, food and water are offered in Gaya for the satisfaction of the departed souls and religious festivals are arranged. By this means the souls of the departed are released from their spirit body. They go to other planes of existence and experience pleasure or pain, and in course of time, are born again in human forms according to their desires. Others attain salvation from those planes. But if a person has some meritorious action to his credit in this life, he does not lose spiritual consciousness altogether in his spirit body.

Life after death

Here the Mother again referred to the priest of the Govinda temple in Brindavan.

Disciple: Is it possible for one to attain to a higher state if one's Sraddha ceremony is performed in Gaya?

Mother: Yes, that is true.[1]

[1] In this connection I am reminded of another incident. The Holy Mother was in Banaras. I had left a day or two before for Gaya to perform the Sraddha ceremony for my dead ancestors. I had said to the Holy Mother before my departure, "Mother, please give your blessings that my ancestors may attain heaven." On the very night of the day I offered food and drink in Gaya for the gratification of my departed ancestors, Bhudev, the Mother's nephew, who had accompanied her to Banaras saw the

Disciple: Then what is the necessity of spiritual practices?

Mother: These dead souls, no doubt, attain to a higher state and live there for some time, but afterwards they are again born in this world according to their past desires. After their birth in a human body some of them obtain salvation in this life, whereas others take inferior births to reap the results of their Karma. This world is moving around like a wheel. That indeed is the last birth in which one gets completely rid of all desires.

Disciple: You just referred to the dead souls attaining to a divine state. Do they go there by themselves or does someone lead them?

Mother: No, they go by themselves. The subtle body is like a body made of air.

Disciple: What happens to those for whom no Sraddha ceremony is performed in Gaya?

Mother: They live in the spirit body until some fortunate ones born in their family perform the

Holy Mother in a dream, engaged in Japa, with a crowd of people around her, saying, "Please give me salvation! Please give me salvation!" The Mother sprinkled over them the holy water kept in a jar and said, "Go away, you are saved!" Then they departed in great happiness. Then another man appeared. The Mother said to him, "I cannot continue like this any longer." He begged of her a long time and at last received her grace. The next day Bhudev narrated this dream to the Holy Mother and she said in reply, "R.——has gone to Gaya to perform the Sraddha ceremony of his ancestors. Therefore all these people have obtained their salvation." In fact, while offering oblations for my departed ancestors with great sincerity, I also offered food and drink for the salvation of all persons whose names I could remember at that time. I prayed for the salvation of all of them.

Sraddha ceremony in Gaya or some other forms of obsequies.

Disciple: We hear of ghosts and spooks. Are they the attendants of Siva or simply spirits? Or are they the spirits of dead people?

Mother: They are the spirits of the dead. The spirit attendants of Siva belong to a special group. One must live very carefully. Every action produces its result. It is not good to use harsh words towards others or be responsible for their suffering.

Disciple: Mother, a margosa tree does not produce a mango, nor does a mango tree produce a margosa fruit. Everyone reaps the result of his own Karma.

The state of non-duality

Mother: You are right, my child. In course of time one does not feel even the existence of God. After attaining wisdom (Jnana) one sees that gods and deities are all Maya. Everything comes into existence in time and also disappears in time.... God and such things really disappear at the dawn of knowledge. The aspirant then realizes that the Mother alone pervades the entire Universe. All then become one. This is the simple truth.

* * *

The Holy Mother was sorting bel leaves for the daily worship when I showed her one of the photographs of her that had been printed recently. I asked if it was a good likeness of hers.

Mother: Yes, this is a good picture but I was stouter before it was taken. Jogin (Swami

Yogananda) was very ill at that time. Worrying about him, I became emaciated. I was very unhappy then. I would weep when Jogin's illness took a turn for the worse and I would feel happy when he felt better. Mrs. Sarah Bull took this photograph. At first I did not agree to it; but she insisted and said, "Mother, I shall take this picture to America and worship it." At last the picture was taken.

Disciple: Mother, that photograph of Sri Ramakrishna which you have with you is a very good one. One feels it when one sees the picture. Well, is that a good likeness of the Master?

Sri Ramakrishna worshipping his own picture

Mother: Yes, that picture is very, very good. It originally belonged to a Brahmin cook. Several prints were made of his first photograph. The Brahmin took one of them. The picture was at first very dark, just like the image of Kali. Therefore it was given to the Brahmin. When he left Dakshineswar for some place—I do not remember where—he gave it to me. I kept the photograph with the pictures of other gods and goddesses and worshipped it. At that time I lived on the ground floor of the Nahabat. One day the Master came there and at the sight of the picture he said, "Hallo, what is all this?" Lakshmi and I had been cooking under the staircase. Then I saw the Master take in his hand the bel leaves and flowers kept there for worship, and offer them to the photograph. He worshipped the picture. This is the same picture.

That Brahmin never returned; so the picture remained with me.

Disciple: Mother, did you ever see the face of the Master to be pale at the time of his Samadhi?

Mother: Why, I don't remember to have seen it so. On the other hand, I always saw a smile on his face in his ecstatic mood.

Disciple: It is possible to have a smile during the state of emotional ecstasy (Bhava Samadhi); but regarding the photograph of his sitting posture, the Master said that it was a picture of a very exalted state. Is it possible to have a smile in that state?

Mother: But I have seen him smile in all states of Samadhi.

Disciple: Of what complexion was he?

Mother: His complexion was like the colour of gold—like that of Harital (yellow orpiment). His complexion blended with the colour of the golden amulet which he wore on his arm. When I used to rub him with oil, I could clearly see a lustre coming out of his entire body . . . . When he would come out of his room in the temple, people used to stand in line and say to one another, "Ah, there he goes!" He was fairly stout. Mathur Babu gave him a low stool to sit on. It was a rather wide stool, but it was not quite big enough to hold him comfortably when he would squat on it to take his meals. People would look at him wonder-struck when he

went with slow, steady steps to the Ganges to take his bath.

When he was at Kamarpukur, men and women looked at him with mouths agape whenever he chanced to come out of the house. One day as he went out for a walk in the direction of the canal known as 'Bhutir Khal', the women who had gone there to fetch water looked at him agape and said, "There the Master goes!" Annoyed at this, Sri Ramakrishna said to Hriday, "Well, Hridu, please put a veil on my head at once."

I never saw the Master sad. He was joyous in the company of everyone, were he a boy of five or a man of ripe old age. I never saw him morose, my child. Ah, what happy days those were! At Kamarpukur he would get up early in the morning and tell me, "Today I shall eat this particular green, please cook it for me." With the other women of the family I would accordingly arrange for his meal. After a few days he said, "What has come over me? The moment I get up from sleep I say, 'What shall I eat?, What shall I eat?'" Then he said to me, "I have no desire for any particular food. I shall eat whatever you will cook for me."

He used to go to Kamarpukur to get relief from severe diarrhoea from which he was suffering at Dakshineswar. He used to say, "Goodness, my belly is filled only with filth. There is no end to it!" Suffering thus, he developed a kind of hatred for the body and thereafter he did not pay much heed to it . . . .

Nowadays you see so many devotees everywhere. There is so much excitement and noise. But during the illness of the Master one of the devotees ran away in order to avoid giving twenty rupees. The expenses for the treatment of the Master during his illness were raised by subscription, and this devotee had been asked to contribute that sum. Now it is not at all difficult to serve the Master. For though food is offered to him, it is really eaten by the devotees. If you make the Master sit, he will sit. If you make him lie down, he will remain in that position. After all, he is now a picture!

The Master saw (in a vision) Balaram Babu with a turban on his head and his hands folded, standing by the image of Kali. After that Balaram always remained with folded hands before the Master. He never saluted the Master by touching his feet. The Master understood his thought and said to him one day, "O Balaram, my foot is itching; kindly massage it gently." Immediately Balaram sent for Naren or Rakhal or someone else among the boys who attended on the Master, and asked him to massage his feet.

Disciple: Once I asked Swami Brahmananda about Sri Ramakrishna's complexion. He said, "The Master's complexion was like mine (*i.e.* dark)."

Mother: Yes, he looked like that when Rakhal and other disciples met him. At that time he had lost his former good health and complexion. For example look at me and see my complexion and health. Did

I use to look like this formerly? No, I was very pretty then. I was not stout, but later on I became so . . . .

It was the time of worship. The Mother made herself ready to go to the shrine room. I came downstairs. After the worship was over, I went upstairs again to bring the Prasada for the devotees. As I took the leaves containing the sweets and fruits, suddenly my elbow touched the Holy Mother's feet. "Ah!" said the Mother, and saluted me with folded hands. "That's nothing," said I. But she was not satisfied with merely bowing down before me and said, "Come, my child, let me kiss you." She touched my chin with her hand and kissed it and so became pacified. Thus she used to respect her disciples as the manifestations of God, and at the same time show her affection to them as a mother does to her own children.

29th October, 1910

It was early in the morning. I was seated near the Mother's bed. She began to talk to me about the Master.

Disciple: Does the Master really live in the picture?

The Master's presence

Mother: Of course, he does. The body and the shadow are the same.[1] And what is his picture but a shadow?

Disciple: Does he live in all the pictures?

[1] It is for this reason that one does not walk over the shadow of an elder. One day, while living at Jayrambati, I was returning

Mother: Yes. If you pray to him constantly before his picture, then he manifests himself through that picture. The place where the picture is kept becomes a shrine. Suppose a man worships the Master there (pointing to a plot of land north of the Udbodhan), then the place is associated with his presence.

Disciple: Well, good and bad memories are associated with all places.

Mother: It is not exactly like that. The Master will pay special attention to such a place.

Disciple: Does the Master really partake of the food that you offer him?

Mother: Yes, he does.

Disciple: But we do not see any sign of it.

Mother: A light comes out of his eyes and licks all the articles of food. Why? Does the Master require any food? He doesn't. He eats the food-offering only for the gratification of the devotees. The sacred Prasada purifies the heart. The mind becomes impure, if one eats food without first offering it to God.[1]

The Deity partakes of offerings

home after my bath. The Mother was also coming back from the tank. I was walking by her side, and now and then I stepped over her shadow. The Mother asked me to walk on her other side. At first I did not know that I had been walking over her shadow.

[1] A devotee had once accepted from the Holy Mother the ochre robe of the monastic life. He suffered from illness for some years and had been to several places for change of air. Later he spent some time at his home instead of living at the monastery. One day he came to Jayrambati and returned the ochre robe to the Holy Mother. Referring to the incident, the Holy Mother said, "Alas! His mind has become impure on account of his eating the food of worldly-minded people."

Disciple: Does the Master really partake of the food-offering?

Mother: Yes. Do I not notice whether he partakes of the food or not? The Master takes his seat before the plate and then partakes of the food.

Disciple: Do you then actually see it?

Mother: Yes. In the case of some offerings, he actually eats and in other cases he merely looks at them. Take your own case. You don't like to eat all things at all times. Nor do you relish the food offered by anyone and everyone. It is like that. One's love of God depends entirely upon one's inner feeling. Love of God is the essential thing.

Disciple: How does one get love of God? Even if one's own son be brought up by someone else, he does not recognize his own mother as his mother.

Divine grace: God is one's own

Mother: Yes, that is true. The grace of God is the thing that is needful. One should pray for the grace of God.

Disciple: How can one speak of deserving grace, or not deserving it? Grace is the same for all.

Mother: One must pray sitting on the bank of the river. He will be taken across in proper time.

Disciple: Everything happens when the proper time comes. Then where does God's grace come in?

Mother: Must you not sit with the fishing rod in your hand, if you want to catch the fish?

Disciple: If God be our 'own', why then should one sit and wait?

Mother: That is true. It may happen even out of season. Don't you see nowadays how people get fruits like mango and jack out of season? How many mangoes grow nowadays in the month of Bhadra!

Disciple: Is this our limit, that He sends us away by giving us what we desire? Or, can one get Him as one's very 'own'? Is God my very 'own'?

Mother: Yes, God is one's very 'own'. It is the eternal relationship. He is everyone's 'own'. One realizes Him in proportion to the intensity of one's feeling for Him.

Disciple: Intense feeling is like a dream. A man dreams what he thinks.

Mother: Yes, it is a dream. The whole world is a dream; even this (the waking state) is a dream.

Disciple: No, this is not a dream, for then it would have disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. This state exists for many, many births.

Mother: Let it be so; still it is nothing but dream. What you dreamt last night does not exist now. (As a matter of fact, on the previous night the disciple had an amazing dream.) A farmer who lost a son dreamt at night that he was a king and the father of eight sons. When the dream vanished, he said to his wife, "Shall I weep for my eight children or for this one?"

After arguing thus with the Mother, I said, "Mother, I don't really bother my head about what I just said to you. All that I want to know is whether there is anyone whom I may call my 'own'."

Mother: Yes, such a One exists.

Disciple: Surely?

Mother: Yes.

Disciple: If He be really our 'own', then why should we pray unto Him in order to see Him? One who is truly my 'own' would come to me even if I did not call on Him. Does God do things for us as our parents do?

Mother: Yes, that is true, my child. He Himself has become our father and mother. He Himself brings us up as our parents. It is He alone who looks after us. Otherwise where were you and where are you now? Your parents brought you up, but at last realized that you did not belong to them. Have you not seen a cuckoo brought up in the nest of a crow?

Disciple: Shall I realize God as really my 'own'?

Mother: Yes, surely you will realize Him. Whatever you think, you will get. Did not Swamiji (referring to Swami Vivekananda) realize Him? You will realize Him as Swamiji did.

Disciple: Mother, please see that I am not overcome by fear or slackening of faith.

Mother: There is no such danger for you. For I myself have hooked the fish.

Disciple: That is good. We all shall enjoy it.

Mother: Yes, that is right. One makes the mould and many others make their images from it.

Disciple: Yes, we shall get everything if you only work for us. You cannot set us aside.

Mother: Yes, my child, you will have all if I do it for you.

* * *

In the forenoon a devotee had arrived from Shillong. Doubtful about the divine nature of the Mother, he had taken a vow that he would not visit her unless he had seen her in dream seven times. He had the requisite visions. Therefore he had gone to Jayrambati to pay his respects to her. In the afternoon, as he was about to take leave of her, he said, "Mother, I shall say good-bye now. Do I need anything else?"

Mother: Yes, surely. You must have your initiation.

Devotee: I may have it at Baghbazar in Calcutta.

Mother: Better finish that task, my child. Have your initiation today.

Devotee: But I have eaten the Prasada.

Mother: That doesn't matter.

After the initiation, the devotee departed.

Earlier in the morning another devotee an eccentric young man, had come and clamoured before the Mother for Sannyasa. He also demanded that the Mother should make him 'mad' and give him the vision of the Master immediately. The Mother somehow pacified him for the time being and sent him home. The mental state of the eccentric devotee took a turn for the worse after he returned home from Jayrambati. He became restless for the vision of the Master and felt piqued to think that though the Holy Mother could, by her mere will, make him

get a vision of Sri Ramakrishna, she refused to do so. In a very angry state of mind he came back to Jayrambati and said to her, "Mother, won't you enable me to see the Master?" The Mother said tenderly, "Yes, you will see Him; don't be so restless." He could not stand it any longer. He said in an angry voice, "You are only deceiving me. Here is the rosary you gave me. Take it back. I don't care for it any more." With these words he threw the rosary at her. "All right," said the Mother, "remain for ever the child of Sri Ramakrishna!" He left the place at once.

Afterwards the devotee went really mad. He began writing abusive letters to the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission and did not spare even the Holy Mother in this respect.

One day, referring to this devotee, I asked the Holy Mother, "Did he also return the Mantra? He threw away his rosary. Can anyone ever return the Mantra?"

Mother: Can that ever be possible? The word of the Mantra is living. Can anyone, who has received it, give it back? Can he, once having felt attraction for the Guru, get rid of him? Some day in the future this man will come round and fall at the feet of those whom he now abuses.

Devotee: Why does such a thing come to pass?

Mother: One sees such things. One Guru may initiate many disciples, but can they all be of the same nature? Spiritual life manifests in a devotee

according to his nature. He once said to me, "Mother, make me mad." "Why?" said I, "why should you be mad, my child? Can anyone, without committing much sin, ever be mad?" He said, "My younger brother has seen the Master. Please let me also have a vision of Him." I said in reply, "Who can ever see him with the physical eyes? But one may do so by closing his eyes. Your brother is a child. He may have visualized the Master with his eyes closed; but he thinks that he has seen him with his eyes open." I asked him to continue his spiritual life—to practise spiritual disciplines and pray to the Master—and told him that he also would have the vision. Man knows in his own mind how far he has advanced and how much knowledge and consciousness of God he has attained. He knows in his innermost soul how much of God he has realized. Besides, who has been able to see God with his physical eyes?"

This devotee, after having been scolded at the Udbodhan Office, used to live on the bank of the Ganges. Sometimes he would sit on the door-sill of the Udbodhan Office and would take his meal there. After some time, he was brought once to the Holy Mother with her permission. She tried to pacify him in various ways and said, "The Master used to say, 'At the time of death I shall have to stand by those who pray to me.' These are words from his own mouth. You are my child. What should you be afraid of? Why should you behave like a madman? That will disgrace the Master. People will

say that his devotee has become mad. Can you conduct yourself in a way that will discredit the name of the Master? Go home and live as others do. Eat and live like them. At the time of your death, he will reveal himself to you and take you to him. Can you tell me if anyone ever got a vision of him with physical eyes? It was only Naren (Swami Vivekananda) who saw him thus. That happened in America when he had intense yearning for him. Naren then used to feel that the Master was grasping his arm. That vision also lasted only for a few days. Now go home and live there happily. How miserable are the worldly people! The other day Ram's son passed away. You can at least sleep with an easy heart."

The devotee was much pacified by the Holy Mother's consolation and words of instruction. He took his meal at the Udbodhan Office and later returned to his native village. He gradually regained his normal state of mind.

JAYRAMBATI

26th May, 1911

The Holy Mother returned to Calcutta from her pilgrimage to Rameswaram and after a few days went back to Jayrambati. One evening, while seated on the porch of her old house, she asked me about a monastic devotee.

Mother: What did he say?

Disciple: He felt a yearning for you for three or four months.

Mother: How strange! A Sannyasin must sever all bondage of Maya. A golden chain is as good a shackle as an iron one. A Sannyasin must not entangle himself in any form of Maya. Why should he constantly say, "Oh! Mother's love! Mother's love! I am deprived of it"? What ideas! I do not like men constantly hanging on me. At least he has the form of a man; I am not talking of God. And I am to move about with women. Ashu also used to come to me frequently to make sandal paste or on some other pretext. One day I warned him.

Disciple: Will the Sannyasins who profess the ideals of the Vedanta attain to Nirvana?

Mother: Surely. By gradually cutting off the bonds of Maya they will realize Nirvana and merge themselves in God. This body is, no doubt, the outcome of desires. The body cannot live unless there is a trace of desire. All comes to an end when a man gets rid of desires completely.

Desire is the support of the body

Children (*i.e.* devotees) come here, eat their meals, enjoy themselves and then go away. Why should I be attached to them? One day Hazra said to the Master: "Why do you constantly long for Narendra and other youngsters? They are quite happy by themselves, eating, drinking and playing. You had better fix your mind on God. Why should you be attached to them?" At these words, the Master

took his mind away from the young disciples completely and merged it in the thought of God. Instantaneously he entered into Samadhi; his beard and hair stood straight on end like the Kadamba flower. Just imagine what kind of a man the Master was! His body became hard like a wooden statue. Ramlal, who was attending on him, said repeatedly, "Please be your former self again." At last the mind came down to the normal plane. It was only out of compassion for people that he kept his mind on the material plane.

On Nirvana and other states of salvation

At the time of death, Yogin (Swami Yogananda) wanted Nirvana. Girish Babu said to him, "Look here, Yogin! Don't accept Nirvana. Don't think of the Master as pervading the entire Universe, the sun and the moon forming his eyes. Think of the Master as he used to be to us, and thus thinking of Him, go to Him." Deities and angels, whoever they be, are born again on this earth. They do not eat or talk in their subtle bodies.

Disciple: If they neither eat nor talk, then how do they spend their days?

Mother: Immersed in meditation they remain where they are, like wooden images, for ages! Like the images of the kings I saw at Rameswaram, standing there dressed in royal robes! When God needs them, he brings them down from their respective places. There are different heavenly planes, such as the Yama-loka, Satya-loka, and

Dhruva-loka. The Master said that he had brought down Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) from the plane of the Seven Sages (Sapta-rishis). His words are verily the words of the Veda. They can never be untrue.

Disciple: Must we also, then, live like images of wood or clay?

Mother: Oh, no! You will serve the Master. There are two classes of devotees. One class devotes itself to the service of God, as on this earth; and another group is immersed in meditation for ages, like the images.

Isvarakotis can come back from Nirvana

Disciple: Well, Mother, the Master used to say that the Isvarakotis can come back to the relative plane of consciousness even after the attainment of Nirvana; others cannot do so. What does that mean?

Mother: The Isvarakoti, even after the attainment of Nirvana, can gather back his mind from it and direct it to the ordinary plane of consciousness.

Disciple: How can the mind that has merged itself in God be brought back again to the world? How can one ever separate a jar of water from the water of the lake, if it has been poured into it?

Mother: Not all can do so. Only the Paramahamsas can. A Hamsa can separate the milk from a mixture of water and milk, and drink only the milk.

Disciple: Can all get rid of desires?

Mother: If they could, then this creation would have come to an end. The creation is going on because all cannot be free of desires. People with desires take their births again and again.

Desires and salvation

Disciple: Suppose a man gives up his body standing in the waters of the Ganges.

Mother: Freedom from birth is possible only when there is no trace of desire. Otherwise, nothing else is of any avail. If one does not get rid of desires, what will one gain, even if this be one's last birth in this world?

Disciple: Mother, infinite is this creation; who can tell what is happening in a remote plane? Who can say if any living beings inhabit any of those innumerable stars and planets?

Mother: It is possible only for God to be omniscient in this realm of Maya. Perhaps there is no living being in those planets and stars.

* * *

One day in the rainy season of the same year, 1911, Swami Saradananda, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma and several other devotees went to Kamarpukur from Jayrambati. Yogin-Ma slipped on the road, cut some parts of her body and blood flowed. I returned to Jayrambati ahead of the party and told the Holy Mother about Yogin-Ma's accident. The Mother said sadly, "Golap said before they set out, 'Yogin is going with us; let us see how often she slips on the road.' Yogin fell down to vindicate Golap's

words. After all, those were the words of a spiritual woman. She practises spiritual disciplines. Therefore her words must bear fruit. Hence a holy person must not say anything bad about anyone."

UDBODHAN OFFICE, CALCUTTA

16th January, 1912

Speeding up of spiritual evolution

I was with the Holy Mother in the morning in her room. I said to her, "Mother, Sri Chaitanya one day blessed Narayani, saying, 'May you have devotion to Krishna!' The words had such a magic effect that the girl, only three or four years old, rolled on the ground uttering, 'Ah, Krishna! Oh, Krishna!' We have read a story about Narada. After he had realized God, one day he felt compassion for an ant. He said to himself, 'I have attained to perfection as the result of practising austerities through many human births, and this poor ant will have to wait so long, even before it is born as a man!' Tenderly he blessed the ant, saying, 'Be free!' Immediately the ant assumed such non-human forms as birds, beasts, and so forth, and gradually took the body of a man. It passed through many human births, enjoyed the experiences associated with them, and step by step, directed its attention to spiritual disciplines. It worshipped God and attained salvation. Narada saw in the twinkling of an eye all these events of innumerable births. Therefore one may get

liberation instantaneously through the grace of a great soul."

Mother: That is true.

Disciple: But I have also heard that one cannot keep one's body long, if one accepts the burden of the sins of others. The body that might have been instrumental in getting salvation for many, withers away for the sake of one sinful person.

Mother: That's also true. Further, a great soul thus loses his power. The power of austerities and spiritual disciplines that might have been utilized for the liberation of many souls, is spent for the sake of one person. The Master used to say, "I have all these physical ailments because I have taken upon myself the sins of Girish." But now Girish also is suffering.

Great souls and redemption of sinners

Disciple: Mother, one day I had a dream. I saw that a man with shaggy hair came to you and insisted that you must do something for him at once. He had previously been initiated by you. But he himself would not practise any spiritual discipline. You said, "If I do something for him, then I shall not live; my body will fall off immediately." With all the earnestness I could command, I forbade you to show any kindness to this man and said, "Why should you do anything for him? He will achieve his own salvation. Let him practise Sadhana." As he insisted again and again, you became disgusted with him, did something to him by touching his chest and neck,

and said repeatedly, "If I do something for him, then I shall not live; my body will fall off immediately." Then my dream disappeared. Well, is it true that one's power becomes limited when one is born in a physical body?

Mother: Yes, that is so. Many a time, disgusted with the repeated requests of some persons, I think, "Well, this body will die some day. Let it fall off this moment. Let me give him salvation."

Meaning of God-realization

Disciple: Mother, does the vision of God mean the attainment of knowledge (Jnana) and spiritual consciousness (Chaitanya)? Or, does it signify something else?

Mother: What else can it mean except the attainment of these? Does anybody mean to say that a man of realization grows two horns?

Disciple: Many of your devotees explain the vision of God differently. They believe that one sees God with physical eyes and talks to Him.

Mother: Yes, they say, "Please show us the Father." But he (Sri Ramakrishna) is nobody's father. The three words—Guru, Master (Karta) and Father (Baba)—pricked him like thorn. How many sages practised austerities for ages and ages! Still they could not realize God. And now people will not practise disciplines or undergo austerities, but they must be shown God immediately! I can't do it. Can you tell me if he (Sri Ramakrishna) had shown God to anyone?

Disciple: Well, Mother, we hear that some seek but do not get, while others do not seek but get. What does this mean?

Mother: God has the nature of a child. Some beg but He does not give them, while others do not want but He asks them to accept. Perhaps the latter had many meritorious acts to their credit in their past births. Therefore God's grace descends on them.

God has the nature of a child

Disciple: Then there is discrimination even in the grace of God.

Mother: Yes, that's true. Everything depends upon Karma (one's past actions). The moment one's Karma comes to an end, one realizes God. That is one's last birth.

Disciple: I admit that the cessation of actions (Karma-kshaya), spiritual disciplines and time are the factors in the attainment of spiritual knowledge and consciousness. But if God be our very 'own', then can't He reveal Himself to His devotees by His mere will?

Knowing God as one's own

Mother: That is right. But who has this faith that He is his 'own'? All practise these or those disciplines because they think it their duty to do so. But how many seek God?

Disciple: Once I said to you that the child does not recognize even its own mother, if it is deprived of her care and love.

Mother: Yes, you have spoken truly. How can one love another unless one sees him? You see, you have seen me. I am your Mother and you are my child.

1st February, 1912

It was about half past nine in the evening when I went to the Holy Mother. I had not seen her for the whole day.

Mother: Where have you been the whole day?

Disciple: I have been busy with accounts downstairs.

Mother: Yes, Prakash told me so. Can anyone who has renounced the world relish these things? Once there was a mistake in the accounts relating to the salary of the Master. I asked him to talk to the manager of the Temple about it. But he said, "What a shame! Shall I bother myself about accounts?" Once he said to me, "He who utters the Name of God never suffers from any misery. No need to speak about you!" These are his very words. Renunciation was his ornament.

The Master's renunciation

9th February, 1912

Girish Chandra Ghosh had given up his body on the previous night. Referring to him, I asked the Holy Mother, "Well, Mother, do those who give up their bodies in a state of unconsciousness attain to a higher spiritual state afterwards?"

The Spiritual state of those who die unconscious

Mother: The thought that is uppermost in mind before one loses consciousness determines the course of one's soul after death.

Disciple: Yes, that is true. A little after six o'clock in the evening Girish Babu exclaimed, "Jai Ramakrishna!" and then fell unconscious. Afterwards he never regained his consciousness. A few minutes before, he had been constantly saying, "Let us go, let us go! . . . Hold me a little, my son!" and so forth. I said to him, "Why do you only say, 'Let us go, let us go!'[1] You had better repeat the name of Sri Ramakrishna, which will do you real good." I said that a couple of times, when Girish Babu replied, "Do I not know that?" I said to myself, "Now see, he is fully conscious within."

Mother: He remained immersed in the thought that was in his mind when he became unconscious. They (referring to Sri Ramakrishna's disciples) all have come from him and will go back to him (*i.e.* the Master). They all have come from him—from his arms, feet, hair and so forth. They are his limbs, parts.

21st February, 1912

It was seven o'clock in the morning. The Holy Mother was seated on the floor near her couch.

[1] Girish Babu had the intense desire to be taken to the Ganges at the time of death. Therefore he made these remarks. His brother said, "Does my brother need the Ganges for the welfare of his soul?"

Swami Nirbhayananda, who had gone to Dwaraka [1] on pilgrimage, sent the Mother some Prasada from the shrine of Dattatreya [2] in the Girnar Hills. The Mother asked, "Who was Dattatreya?"

Disciple: He, like Jada Bharata [3] and others, was a great sage—an Isvarakoti.

Mother: Like some of the children of the Master?

Disciple: Well, how is it that some of the Isvarakotis among the Master's disciples are thus immersed in worldliness with their wives and children?

Mother: Yes, they are rotting there. Purna was forced to marry. His relatives threatened him, saying, "If you go to him (referring to Sri Ramakrishna), we will smash his carriage with stones and brick-bats when he comes to Calcutta."

[1] Dwaraka is a great place of pilgrimage in Western India, north of Bombay Presidency. It is reputed to be the place where the palace of Sri Krishna, the greatest of Divine incarnations, stood.

[2] A great sage of the Puranas, considered to be a Divine incarnation. Shrines dedicated to him are, however, very rare.

[3] He is the same as the sage Bharata mentioned in the footnote of page 159. 'Jada' means 'inert', idiotic. He is called so for the following reason: On account of his attachment to his pet deer, he had to be born as a deer, as explained on page 159. Afterwards he again attained to human birth. Though his spiritual evolution was arrested during these births, he had not lost the memory of his glorious attainments in his birth as King Bharata. So when he was again born as man, he was endowed with Divine knowledge at the very birth, but in order to avoid complications from attachments as before, he shunned all associations by pretending to be dumb and senseless. So he was called Jada Bharata. Eventually he gave proof of his great spiritual attainments.

Disciple: Well, they might have married. Nag Mahasay also married. But to have children and lead a worldly life!

Mother: Perhaps they had some such desires. Let me tell you one thing. There is great complexity in this creation. The Master does one thing through one man and another thing through another person. Oh, it is so inscrutable! But even a householder can be an Isvarakoti. What is the harm?

Radhu was ill. She had pain and fever. The Mother was worried about her and said, "She cannot get well when I am alive. Who will look after her when I am gone? Will she live then?"

Disciple: What a crowd of devotees the whole day! You could not get a moment's respite.

Mother: Day and night, I say to the Master, "Please lessen this rush. Let me have a little rest." But I hardly get it. It will be like this for the few days I am in this body. The message of the Master has spread everywhere; therefore so many people come here. . . . Such crowds used to visit the Master also during his last days. I try to persuade people so earnestly, saying, "Have initiation from your family preceptor (Kulaguru). They expect something from you. I do not expect anything." But they will not leave me. They weep and it moves my heart. Well, I am nearing the end; the few days I shall live, will be spent in this manner.

Disciple: Oh, no, Mother! Why should you say that? You are well. You have no particular ailment.

Why do you, then, want to leave this world? Never say that again.

At that time the Mother appeared very sad and indifferent about things.

During the noontime a hot-headed man had come to the Holy Mother and created a row. Referring to this, she said, "The Master did not let anybody know of my existence. He protected me always with infinite care. Now the thing has gone to the other extreme; they are advertising me, as if by beat of drum in a market-place. M. is at the root of it all. People are beside themselves after reading the *Kathamrita* (or the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*). Girish Babu enforced his demands on the Master and abused him; now people are doing the same thing with me.

"Why should they always bother me about initiation? There are my children (referring to the direct disciples of the Master) at the Belur Math. Have they no power? Everyone is being sent here. I went so far as to tell people that they would be incurring great sin if they give up their hereditary preceptor. But still they would not leave me alone."

Disciple: You initiate the devotees because you desire to do so.

Mother: No, I do so out of compassion. They won't leave me. They weep. I feel compassion for them. Out of kindness I give them initiation. Besides what do I gain by it? When I initiate

A true Guru initiates only out of compassion

devotees, I have to accept their sins. Then I think, "Well, this body will die anyway; let them realize the Truth."

22nd May, 1912

Disciple: Mother, I feel it is purposeless to live unless we have a direct vision of God. Once I asked a Mussalman Fakir, "A man sits with an angling rod on the bank of a lake or a river in the expectation of catching fish. He never does so near a mud-puddle. Have you got a glimpse of that for which you have become a religious mendicant?"

Mother: What did he say?

Disciple: What could he say?

Mother (after a little reflection): You have said the right thing. That is true. What does it avail a man unless he gets some kind of realization? But one should continue to have faith in things spiritual.

Yearning for God

Disciple: The other day Sarat Maharaj said that Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) also had remarked, "Suppose there is a lump of gold in the adjoining room and a thief sees it from this room. There is an intervening wall which prevents him from taking possession of this precious metal. Under that condition, can the man ever sleep? All the time he would be thinking of how he might get at that lump of gold! In the same way, if a man is firmly convinced that there is such a thing as God, can he ever indulge in worldly life?"

Mother: That is true, indeed.

Disciple: Whatever you may say, Mother, renunciation and dispassion are the chief things. Shall we ever acquire them?

Mother: Certainly, you will. You will gain everything if you but take refuge in the Master. Renunciation alone was his splendour. We utter his name and eat and enjoy things because he renounced all. People think that his devotees also must be very great, as he was a man of such complete renunciation.

Sri Ramakrishna's renunciation

Ah, me! One day he went to my room in the Nahabat. He had no spices in his small bag. He used to chew them now and then. I gave him some to chew there, and also handed over to him a few packed in paper to take to his room. He proceeded; but instead of going to his room, he went straight to the embankment of the Ganges. He did not see the way, nor was he conscious of it. He was repeating, "Mother, shall I drown myself!" I became restless with agony. The river was full to the brim. I was then a young woman and would not go out of my room. I could not see anyone about. Whom could I send to him! At last I found a Brahmin belonging to the Kali temple coming in the direction of my room. Through him I called Hriday, who was then taking his meal. He left his plate, ran to the Master, caught hold of him, and brought him back to his room. A moment more and he would have dropped into the Ganges."

Disciple: Why did he go south of the river?

Mother: Because I put a few spices in his hand, he could not find his way. A holy man must not lay things by. His renunciation was a hundred per cent complete.

Once a Vaishnava Sadhu came to the Panchavati. At first he showed a great deal of renunciation. But, alas! finally like a rat, he began to pull and gather various things—pots, cups, jars, grain, rice, pulses and so forth. The Master noticed it and said one day, "Poor thing! This time he is going to be ruined!" He was about to be entangled in the snare of Maya. The Master advised him strongly about renunciation and further asked him to leave the place. Then he went away.

A devotee came to salute the Mother. As he was about to take his leave, she said, "I was once deceived by showing Harish my affection. Therefore I do not nowadays show a person my feelings towards him."

1st May, 1912

In the forenoon I went upstairs to read letters to the Holy Mother.

Disciple: The daughter of a devotee has written from her father-in-law's place that she would like to come here to see you. She has sent you her salutations. She has further requested you to be careful so that her husband's relatives might not know about her writing to you.

Mother: Then do not write any reply to her. Again she wants me to conceal it from her relatives. I do not know such a game of hide and seek. At Jayrambati, Jogindra, the postal deliverer, used to write letters for me. Many complained, saying, "Does the postman see our letters?" They did not like my asking a man in humble position to write my letters for them. Why? There is no deceit in me. Anybody who likes may see my letters.

Another devotee inquired as to when the Holy Mother would return to Jayrambati. I asked her, "May I tell the devotee that you will return there in autumn at the time of the Jagaddhatri Puja?"

Mother: Oh, no, no! Can one be sure of it? As to where I shall be, that remains entirely in the hands of God. Today man is, and tomorrow he is not.

Disciple: O Mother, why should you talk like that? It is because you are alive that so many people are able to see you and get peace of mind.

Mother: Yes, that is true.

Disciple: Please do live for our sake.

In a tender voice, choked with emotion, she said, "Alas! How fond they are of me! I am also very fond of them." Her eyes were moist with tears. The disciple was fanning her. She said to him in a most compassionate voice, "My child, I bless you from my heart that you live long, attain devotion, and enjoy peace. Peace is the principal thing. One needs peace alone."

Disciple: Mother, one idea crops up in my mind constantly: Why do I not get the vision of the Master? As he is our very 'own', why does he not reveal himself to us? Can't he do so by his mere will?

Mother: That is true. Who can say why he does not reveal himself when you suffer from so many miseries and sorrows? Once Balaram's wife was ill. The Master said to me, "Go to Calcutta and visit her." "How can I go?" I said. "I don't see any carriage or other conveyance here." The Master replied in an excited voice: "What! Balaram's family is in such trouble and you hesitate to go! You will walk to Calcutta. Go on foot." At last a palanquin was brought and I set out from Dakshineswar. Twice I visited her during her illness. On another occasion I went on foot at night from Shyampukur. Where, indeed, will man be if God does not protect him in his trouble?

Disciple: I know sorrows and sufferings are inevitable so long as a man lives in the physical body. I do not ask the Master to remove the sufferings. But can't he console us by revealing himself to us in the midst of our troubles and sorrows?

Spiritual realization depends on Divine will

Mother: You are right, my child! The only son of Ram (*i.e.* Balaram's grandson) died the other day. Ram's wife and mother came to me for peace of mind. They were relieved of their grief to some extent. I used to speak to the Master of such things and he would say, "I have millions

of them. I shall cut my goat at the tail or through the back, and then kill it. It is my sweet will."

Disciple: Does he not see our suffering?

Mother: But he has so many like you. He used to tell me, "It is the ocean of consciousness and bliss. How many waves crop up and disappear! There is no end, no limit."

Disciple: A man in the street, whose spiritual consciousness has not been awakened at all, is quite happy. But those whose consciousness has been partially awakened and who want to realize God, suffer a great deal if they do not see Him. They alone know how much they suffer!

Mother: Ah! how true it is! Ordinary people are quite happy. They eat, drink and make themselves merry. The devotees alone know no end of suffering.

Disciple: Don't you suffer at the suffering of the devotees?

Mother: Why should I? He who has created the world looks after all.

Disciple: Don't you want to come back to this earth in a human form for the sake of the devotees?

Mother: Oh! Such suffering in a human body! No more! No more! May I not be born again! At the time of his illness, the Master expressed the desire to eat an Amalaka fruit. Durgacharan procured some after searching for them for three days without food and sleep. The Master asked him to take his meal and himself took some rice in order to

The Master's suffering: its meaning

turn the food into Prasada. I said to the Master, "You are taking rice quite well. Why, then, should your meal consist only of farina pudding? You should take rice rather than pudding." "No, no," said he, "I would rather take farina during these last days of my life." It was such unbearable suffering for him to eat even the farina! Every now and then he would throw it out through his nose. . . .

The Master used to say, "I have been suffering for you all. I have taken upon myself the miseries of the whole world." The Master suffered as he had taken on himself the sins of Girish.

All our sufferings are on this earth. Is there anything elsewhere? People suffer from endless miseries on account of their egoism and at last they say, "Not I, not I; it is Thou, O God! It is Thou!"

Disciple: Will you keep us in your mind hereafter?

Mother: Perhaps not when I enjoy divine bliss after my passing away. My child, time alone is the principal thing. Who knows what will happen in course of time?

Disciple: True, Mother, everything, no doubt, happens under the dominance of time; but there is also a subduer of time.

Mother: Yes, that is true.

Disciple: Please keep yourself well; then everything will be all right.

It was eight o'clock. The Mother asked, "Is it eight o'clock? Perhaps it is. It is time for worship in the shrine room. Let me go now."

I went upstairs with her mail. One of her disciples had passed away at Banaras. The Mother heard the news and remarked, "All must die some day. Instead of dying in a pool or on the bank of a lake, he has died in Banaras!"

Her brothers had written to her asking for money and telling about their family quarrels. I said to her, "Please see that they get plenty of money. Please tell the Master about it. Let them enjoy the material life and come to satiety."

Mother: Will they ever be satiated? Nothing can satisfy them; no, not even if they have plenty. Are the worldly people ever satiated with enjoyments? They always spin out the tale of their woe. It is Kali (one of her brothers) who always wants money. Now Prasanna (another brother) imitates him. Varada (a third brother) never asks for money. He says, "Where will sister get money from?"

Disciple: What about that insane lady? Does she want money?

Mother: She won't accept it even when offered.

Disciple: Why were you born in that family?

Mother: Why not? My father and mother were very good people.

25th June, 1912

It was morning. The Mother was seated near the bedstead in the room adjacent to the shrine. We were engaged in conversation.

Place of work in spiritual life: justification of the activities of the Ramakrishna Order

Disciple: Some say that it is not good for the Sadhus (of the Ramakrishna Order) to work in the Sevashrams (Homes of Service) and dispensaries or to be preoccupied with selling books, accounting and so forth. Did the Master ever undertake such activities? Works of this kind are thrust upon the seekers who enter the Order with a yearning for the realization of God. If anyone must do some work, it must be worship in the shrine, meditation, Japa and devotional music. Activities other than these entangle one in desires and turn one away from God.

Mother: You must not listen to those who talk in that manner. What will you do day and night if you are not engaged in work? Can one practise meditation and Japa for twenty-four hours? You referred to the Master. His case was different. Mathur used to supply him with proper diet. You are able to get your food because you are doing some work. Otherwise you would have to roam from door to door begging for a morsel of food. Perhaps you would fall ill. Besides, where are people today to give alms to the Sadhus? Never pay any heed to such words. Things will go on as the Master directs. The Math will be run on these lines. Those who cannot adjust themselves will go away. One day Mani Mullik visited a Sadhu and reported to the Master. "Well," said the Master, "how did you like him?" "Yes," said Mani, "I saw the Sadhu

but—." The Master asked, "But—what?" "All want money," Mani Mullik replied. The Master said, "How much does a holy man want? Perhaps a pice for tobacco or Ganja. That's all. You need your cups of ghee and milk, a mattress and such things; and the sadhus want a pice for their smoke. Should they not have it?"

Disciple: Enjoyments come from desire alone. A man may live in a four-storied mansion; but he does not really enjoy anything if he has no desire for it. And a man may live under a tree, but if he has desire, he gets all enjoyments from that alone. The Master used to say, "A person may have no relatives anywhere; but Mahamaya may cause him to keep a cat and thus make him worldly. Such is Her play!"

Non-attachment is true absence of desire

Mother: That's true. Everything is due to desire. What bondage is there for a man who has no desire? You see, I live with all these things, but I do not feel any attachment; no, not in the least.

Disciple: Indeed, you can have no desires. But how many insignificant disires crop up in our minds! How can we get rid of them?

Mother: In your case these are no real desires. They are nothing. They are mere fancies that appear and disappear in your mind. The more they come and go, the better for you.[1]

Desires—real and apparent

[1] A Sannyasin devotee once asked the Holy Mother, "I have been practising religious disciplines. I do not relax my efforts in

Disciple: Yesterday I thought how I could fight with my mind unless God assured me of His protection. The moment one desire disappears another crops up.

Mother: So long as the ego exists, desires also undoubtedly remain. But those desires will not injure you. The Master will be your protector. It will be a heinous sin on the part of the Master if he does not protect those who have taken shelter at his feet, who have taken refuge in him renouncing all, and who want to lead a good life. You must live in a spirit of self-surrender to him. Let him do good to you if he so desires, or let him drown you if that be his will. But you are to do only what is righteous, and that also according to the power he has given you.

The aspirant has the protection of the Divine

Disciple: Have I, O Mother, surrendered to him to that extent? Sometimes I feel that I can depend upon him to a small extent, and the next moment it disappears. What will be the way for us if he does not protect us? Sometimes I think that because you, O Mother, are alive, we can report our dangers and difficulties to you and gain peace by a look at your face. Who will protect us after your leaving us? We shall feel safe if you give us assurance.

that direction. But it appears that the impurities of mind are not growing less." The Mother said, "You have rolled different threads on a reel—red, black and white. While unrolling you will see them all exactly in the same way." There are two kinds of desires: one that stimulates enjoyment and the other that quickens dispassion. Though externally they appear the same, their effects are different.

Mother: Don't be afraid, my child. You have nothing to fear. You will not lead a worldly life with wife and children. You will have none of these. Why should you fear? And in the meantime, before my death, you will be able to build up a secure foundation for your spiritual life.

Disciple: What will Japa and austerities avail us if God does not cast His benign look upon us? We shall be protected only if He protects us.

Mother: You have nothing to fear. The Master will certainly protect you. Don't worry.

7th July, 1912

Disciple: Mother, was it not arranged that you would visit Puri at the time of the Car Festival?

Mother: Is it good to go there when there is such a rush of people? Perhaps there will be an epidemic of cholera then. Lakshmikanta, the priest, said, "Even now all the rooms and houses are rented. There is no place to stay in. Even the small rooms have been rented for ten rupees each. Please come during the winter months."

Disciple: How many temples, gods and goddesses the Mussalmans have destroyed! They have cut off the noses of some of the images and the ears of others. . . . There is the temple of Somanath in Gujarat. The priests, in former times, used to bathe the Deity daily with water from Gangotri. Every day people used to carry water from the Himalayas in pots on their heads. Sultan Mohammed demolished

the image and carried away the temple doors that were made of sandal wood. Why should that happen?

Mother: The wicked do not feel the Divine presence in the image. The Deity disappears, as it were, before them. He can do whatever He likes by His mere will. This also is a sport of God.

Disciple: Can the effect of Karma be made null and void? The Scriptures say that knowledge alone can destroy Karma. Still one must reap the result of Prarabdha Karma.

Mother: Karma alone is responsible for our misery and happiness. Even the Master had to suffer from the effect of Karma. Once his elder brother was drinking water while delirious. The Master snatched the glass out of his hand after he had drunk just a little. The brother became angry and said, "You have stopped me from drinking water. You will also suffer likewise. You will also feel such pain in your throat." The Master said, "Brother, I did not mean to injure you. You are ill. Water will harm you. That is why I have taken the glass away. Why have you, then, cursed me in this manner?" The brother said, weeping, "I do not know, brother. Those words have come from my mouth. They cannot but bear fruit." At the time of his illness the Master told me, "I have got this ulcer in my throat because of that curse." I said to him in reply, "How can man

The effects of Karma are inevitable, but spiritual practices can mitigate them

possibly live if such a thing as this can happen to you?" The Master remarked, "My brother was a righteous man. His words must come true. Can the words of anyone and everyone be thus fulfilled?"

The result of Karma is inevitable. But by repeating the Name of God, you can lessen its intensity. If you were destined to have a wound as wide as a ploughshare, you will get a pin-prick at least. The effect of Karma can be counteracted to a great extent by Japa and austerities. This was the case with king Suratha. He had worshipped the Goddess by slaughtering a lakh of goats. Later on, these one hundred thousand goats killed the king with one stroke of the sword; he did not have to be born one hundred thousand times. That was because he had worshipped the Divine Mother. Chanting God's holy Name lessens the intensity of Karmic effects.

Disciple: If that be so, then the law of Karma is supreme in this world. Then why should one believe in God? The Buddhists accept the law of Karma but not God.

Mother: Do you mean to say that there are no Deities like Kali, Krishna, Durga and the like?

Disciple: Is the effect of Karma destroyed by austerities and Japa?

Mother: Why not? It is good to do the right kind of work. One feels happy in doing good and one suffers by doing evil. . . .

Disciple: Many devotees used to visit the Master. Where are they now? None of them comes to see you.

Mother: Oh, they are all leading happy lives!

Disciple: What? Happy!

Mother: You are right. How can a man be happy in this world with his wife and children? They have forgotten themselves in 'woman' and 'gold'. Everything in the world results in suffering, after all.

Disciple: Besides, the mind has outgoing propensities.

Mother: Kali, the Mother of the Universe, is the Mother of all. It is She alone who has begotten both good and evil. Everything has come out of Her womb. There are different kinds of perfect souls—perfect from very birth, perfect through spiritual disciplines, perfect through the grace of the teacher, and made perfect all of a sudden.

Disciple: What is the meaning of 'made perfect all of a sudden'?

Mother: It is like becoming wealthy suddenly by inheriting the riches of another.

Just then Nalini, the Mother's niece, entered the room after a bath in the Ganges. Finding the water-closet a little dirty, she had washed it with a few pots of water, and hence had taken bath in the Ganges for purification. The disciple and the Mother opined that she need have bathed under the tap alone.

Nalini: How is that enough? A water-closet!

Mother: I too had to purify myself for coming into contact with filth on several occasions. But I only chanted the Name of Govinda[1] a few times and felt pure. The mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure and impure. A man, first of all, must make his own mind guilty and then alone he can see another man's guilt. Does anything ever happen to another if you enumerate his faults? It only injures you. This has been my attitude. Hence I cannot see anybody's faults. If a man does a trifle for me, I try to remember him even for that. To see the faults of others! One should never do it. I never do so. Forgiveness is Tapasya (austerity).

Purity depends on the mind

Disciple: Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) used to say, "Suppose a thief entered the house and stole something. The idea of thief would flash in your mind. But a baby has no such idea. Therefore it would not see anyone as a thief."

Mother: That's true, indeed. He who has a pure mind sees everything pure. . . .

One could be born with a pure mind if one had performed many austerities and spiritual practices in a previous birth.

Disciple: Mother, my mind does not feel joy in doing Japa or spiritual practices.

Mother (smiling): Why? Not a little even?

Disciple: Oh, I do a little rather half-heartedly. The next moment I think, "What is the use of

[1] A name of God.

mumbling? If God exists, then He is; let me rather try meditation."

Mother: Can you meditate?

Disciple: No, I cannot do even that. I understand everything; but I cannot practise them and get peace. You know the road to Dakshineswar very well, but can you walk all the way?

Lalit Babu entered the room and saluted the Mother. They became engaged in conversation, the disciple joining in it now and then.

Mother: The Master used to say, "The way is extremely difficult, like the sharp edge of a razor." (After a little pause) But He has kept you in His arms. He is looking after you.

Lalit: The Master will take us in his arms after death; is there anything great in that? If he would only do so while we are in this body!

Mother: He is holding you in his arms even in this body. He is above your head. Truly he is holding you.

Disciple: Does he really hold us? Are you telling the truth?

Mother (firmly): Yes, really, truly.

The Mother finished the morning worship and distributed Prasada in Shal leaves to the devotees. Then she swept the room. As she took the dirt in her hand, a pin entered her little finger. The finger bled and the Mother suffered terribly from pain. As soon as the disciple heard about it he ran upstairs. Someone asked him to apply hot lime. That greatly

relieved the pain. The Mother said to him affectionately, "My child, you are my own. Truly you are my very own."

BANARAS

November, 1912

The Holy Mother was on a visit to the sacred city of Banaras, where the following conversation took place:

Disciple: All the pilgrims touch the image of Visvanatha (Siva). Therefore it is bathed in the evening. Afterwards the priests worship the Deity and give the food-offering.

Mother: The priests allow people to touch the image out of greed for money. Why should they do so? It is enough to see the image from a distance. Otherwise people of immoral character would touch the image.

There are some people whose very touch creates a burning sensation in the body. It is so painful. Therefore I wash my hands and feet after they touch me. Fortunately the rush of people here is less than in Calcutta.

Disciple: One can see you here only after obtaining the permission of the senior Swamis. This arrangement has been made in order to lessen the rush.

Mother: Who cares to hold court, as it were, at different places?

Her lunatic sister-in-law tormented her even in Banaras. Referring to this she said: "Perhaps I worshipped Siva with Bilva leaves having thorns. Therefore I have this thorn in my life in the shape of this sister-in-law."

Disciple: How is that? What's the harm in offering thorny Bilva leaves to Siva unknowingly?

Mother: No, no. It is extremely difficult to worship Siva. It harms a person even if he makes a mistake unconsciously. But the fact is that those who are having their last birth suffer from the effects of past Karma in this one.

I do not remember having committed any sin since my very birth. I touched the Master at the age of five. I might not have understood him at that time, but he undoubtedly touched me. Why should I suffer so much? By touching him all others are being freed from Maya; why should I alone have so much entanglement? Day and night, my mind wants to soar high. I force it down, out of compassion for people. And yet I am so tormented!

Disciple: Let them do whatever they like. Please bear with us all. A person cannot be angry so long as he is conscious of himself.

Mother: Right you are, my child. There is no other virtue higher than forbearance. This is a body of flesh and blood. Sometimes I may say something in a fit of anger.

Then the Mother added, saying to herself, "He who warns in time is a true friend. What's the

use of saying 'Ah!', when the right time has passed?"

11th December, 1912

The Holy Mother, while in Banaras, used to listen to the reading of the *Kashi Khanda*.[1] One evening, after the reading of the book, she was engaged in conversation with the disciple.

Disciple: Do all that die in Banaras gain liberation?

Mother: The Scriptures say, "Yes."

Disciple: What is your direct experience? The Master saw that Siva Himself whispers the holy word (Taraka-Brahma) into the ears of the dead.

Mother: I don't know about it, my child; I have not seen anything of this kind.

Disciple: I cannot believe unless I hear something from you on this point.

Mother: I shall tell the Master, "R—does not want to believe. Please show me something about it."

I referred to the destruction of temples in many places in India during the Mussalman rule and said, "There was so much oppression. What did God do to prevent it?"

Mother: God has infinite patience. People worship Siva by pouring water in jugs over the head of the Deity day and night. Does it affect Him in the least? Or they worship Him, covering the image with dry

[1] A canto of the *Skanda Purana* (a Hindu religious scripture), relating specially to Banaras.

cloths. Does it trouble Him at all? God's patience knows no limit.

Dying in Banaras leads to salvation

The following morning, the Holy Mother said to K— Maharaj, "Yesterday night I lay awake on my bed when I suddenly saw the image of Narayana of the Seth's temple of Brindavan standing by my side. The garland of flowers round the neck of the Deity hung up to the feet. The Master stood with folded hands in front of the image. I thought, 'How could the Master come here?' I said, 'R— does not want to believe.' The Master said, 'He must. This is all true.' He meant that one dying in Banaras gains liberation. That Narayana image said to me two things. One was: 'Can one ever get the knowledge of Reality unless one knows the truth about God?' The other thing I do not recall."

K— Maharaj: Why did the Master stand with folded hands before the image of Narayana?

Mother: That was the characteristic attitude. He was humble before all.

I called on the Mother in the morning and asked her, referring to the conversation of the previous day: "Please tell me if one dying in Banaras gains liberation. What have you seen?"

Mother: The Scriptures say so. Besides, so many people come here with this faith. What else can happen to him who has taken refuge in the Lord?

Disciple: It is, of course, true that he who has taken refuge in God will be liberated. But take the case of those who have not surrendered themselves to God, who are not His devotees, or who belong to other faiths,—will they also get liberation by dying at Banaras?

Mother: Yes, they too. Banaras is permeated with the spirit of God. All living beings of this place, even the moths and insects, are filled with divine consciousness. Any being that dies here—be it a devotee, an atheist, one belonging to another religion, or even an insect or moth—will surely be liberated.

Disciple: Are you speaking the truth?

Mother: Yes, it is true, indeed. Otherwise how can you explain the glory of the holy place?

Nearby there were some sweets that had been offered to the Lord. A fly, buzzing about, sat on my arm. Pointing to it, I said, "Even this fly?"

Mother: Yes, even that fly. All living beings of this place are filled with the spirit of God. Bhudev wanted to take home two young pigeons that had been caught in the niche over the staircase. I said to him, "No, no; you must not take them away. They are inhabitants of Banaras." The women coming from East Bengal live in the Bangalitola. Have they no love for their homes and properties, friends and relatives? But they all have settled down here in order to breathe their last in Banaras. They have such wisdom. They are without attachment.

Disciple: You see, how spiritual are the people of East Bengal!

Mother: Yes, that's true. People of our district are devoid of spiritual wisdom. Take the case of the father-in-law of Radhu. His family owns a house in Banaras. Still the members of the family are frightened at the very mention of Banaras. They fancy that they will not die if they cling to their native village. Death, however, moves with us as our shadow.

Disciple: Are you really speaking the truth when you say that one dying here gains liberation?

Mother (sharply): I cannot swear before you thrice. Swearing once is bad enough. Swearing three times! And that, too, in Banaras!

Disciple (smiling): Please see that I do not die in Banaras. In that case where shall I be and where will you be? We shall not see each other.

Mother (smiling): How stupid! He says that he does not want to die in Banaras.

Disciple: Mother, seeing is believing. One believes in a statement when it can be corroborated by direct perception.

Mother: What else shall you do if you do not believe in the words of high-souled men? Is there any other way except the one trodden by sages and seers and other holy men?

Disciple: None, indeed! What else can I do but listen to the seers who have had direct perception? That is why I have put the question to you.

I shall let you go only when you will give me a direct reply.

Mother: Does it matter in the least to God whether you believe or not? Even the sage Suka Deva was to Him like a big ant at the most. Infinite is He. How much can you understand of Him? Our Master was a man of direct perception. He saw everything; he knew everything. His words are the words of the Veda. What will you do if you do not believe in his words?

Disciple: The Scriptures differ. Some Scriptures say 'this' and others 'that'. Which shall we accept? That is why I am bothering you.

Scriptures are sometimes uncertain guides

Mother: That's true, indeed. The almanac makes a forecast of rain. But you do not get a drop by squeezing its pages. Besides, the Scriptures are filled with many useless things. One cannot observe, to the letter, the injunctions of the Scriptures. The Master used to say, "The Bhakti hedged round by the Scriptural injunctions hardly justifies the name. . . ."

Truth and salvation

In this Kali Yuga one attains to God if one simply sticks to truth. The Master used to say, "He who speaks nothing but truth is lying on the lap of God." During the Master's illness at Dakshineswar, I used to boil and condense milk for him and take to him two pounds of milk saying that it was one. I would not tell him the correct quantity. One day

he came to know about it and said, "What is this? Stick to truth. You see, I have bowel complaints on account of my taking a large quantity of milk." Surprisingly enough, that very day he suffered from disorder of the bowels. He had all powers, but that is not so with us.

Disciple: My asking you all these questions or talking in this manner is not really meant for me. I do not worry about myself. I have a different feeling about it. What I want to know is this: I address you as my mother. Are you really my mother?

Mother: Who else am I? Yes, I am your own mother.

Disciple: You may say so. But I do not clearly see this. Naturally and spontaneously I know the mother who gave birth to my body as my own mother. But can I think of you likewise?

Mother: Alas, it is true, indeed!

A few moments later, she added, "My child, He alone is our father and mother. He alone has become our father and mother."

December, 1912

Disciple: What is the need of Tapasya (austerities)?

Mother: It is very necessary. Look at Yogin. How much does she fast even now? She practises intense austerities. Golap is an adept in Japa. One day Naren's mother came to visit me. Naren said to her, "Perhaps you had practised austerities.

The need of Tapasya

Therefore you got Vivekananda as your son. Repeat them and then you may get another. . . ."

The Master practised all kinds of disciplines. He used to say, "I have made the mould; now you may cast the image."

Disciple: What is the meaning of casting the image?

Bhudev: It means to meditate on the Master and mould yourself after him.

Mother: Yes, he has understood it. To cast the image means to meditate and contemplate on the Master, to think of the various incidents of his life. By meditating on him, one gets all the spiritual moods. He used to say, "One who remembers me never suffers from want of food or from other physical privations."

The glory of the Master's personality

Maku: Did he himself say this?

Mother: Yes, these are the very words from his mouth. By remembering him one gets rid of all sufferings. Don't you see that all his devotees are happy? Elsewhere you will not find devotees like those of the Master. Here, in Banaras, I see so many holy men; but can you point out one like his devotees?

Disciple: There is a reason for that, Mother. About him we feel as if the market has just come to a close. All the signs of the market are there: People are still moving about. The devotees and the intimate disciples of the Master are still alive. We feel that

the Master, as it were, is very near us. He has not gone away to any great distance. We shall get the response if we but call on him.

Mother : Yes, many people do get it.

Disciple : Krishna, Rama and others seem to belong to a bygone age. They are not near enough to respond to our prayer.

Mother : Yes, that is true.

Referring to the Cossipore Garden, the disciple said, "It is a sacred place and now a European gentleman lives there.

Mother : At the Cossipore Garden the Master spent the last days of his life. The place is associated with so much meditation, Samadhi and the practice of austerities. It is the place where the Master entered into Mahasamadhi. It is a place permeated with intense spiritual vibration. One realizes God-consciousness by meditating there. The place may be acquired if the Master commands its owner through dream to hand it over to the Belur Math.

Then the Mother talked about the disciples of the Master, whereupon the disciple asked her, "Please tell me who these disciples of the Master are. We cannot recognize them."

Mother : What do I know ? But it is true that those who had been born with the Master in his previous incarnations have accompanied him this time also.

Disciple : I do not have any such desire as to see a four-handed Deity and the like. I am quite satisfied with what we have.

Mother: That is also the case with me. What shall we gain by these supernatural visions? For us the Master exists—and he is everything.

JAYRAMBATI

March, 1913

Dr. Lalit of Shyambazar and Prabodh Babu arrived. At about four o'clock in the afternoon they came to the Holy Mother and saluted her. The following conversation took place:

Lalit Babu: Mother, what rules and regulations should one observe regarding food?

On pure and impure food

Mother: One should not eat the food given at funeral obsequies (Sraddha ceremony). It does harm to devotional life. Sri Ramakrishna used to forbid it. Besides, first offer to God whatever you eat. One must not eat unoffered food. As your food is, so will be your blood. From pure food you get pure blood, pure mind and strength. Pure mind begets ecstatic love (Prema Bhakti).

Lalit Babu: Mother, we are householders. What shall we do at the Sraddha ceremony of our relatives?

Mother: Supervise the ceremony and give help to your relatives so that they may not be offended; but try somehow to avoid taking meals on that day. If you cannot do that, then on the day of the Sraddha ceremony eat what is offered to Vishnu or other

gods. The devotees can partake of the food of the Sraddha ceremony if it is offered to God.

Lalit Babu: Many a time there remains an excess of unused food-stuff procured for the Sraddha ceremony. Can one cook and eat that?

Mother: Yes, you can. That will not injure you, my child. A householder cannot help it.

Prabodh Babu: Mother, the Master loved renunciation, but how little we practise it!

Spiritual progress is gradual

Mother: Yes, you will acquire it slowly. You make some progress in this life, a little more in the next and so on. It is the body alone that changes, the Atman always remains the same. Renunciation of 'lust' and 'gold'! The Master used to say, "I can change Kamarpukur into gold, if I so desire, by requesting Mathur Babu to do so; but what good will that do? It is all transitory." Regarding some devotees, the Master used to say that it was their last birth. He would remark, referring to some devotee, "You see, he has no desire whatsoever for anything. This is his last birth."

The devotees prostrated themselves before the Mother and took their leave of her.

Are Sudras and women entitled to Sannyasa?

Speaking about the objection of certain people that some of Sri Ramakrishna's Sannyasin disciples, being Sudras, are not entitled for Sannyasa, according to orthodox rules, the Mother said, "The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are Jnanis and therefore

Sannyasins. A Jnani can be a Sannyasin. Take the case of Gaurdasi. A woman cannot be initiated into Sannyasa, but is Gaurdasi a woman? She is more than a man! How many men are there like her? See what she has achieved—built a school, acquired horses, a carriage, and so forth. The Master used to say, 'If a woman embraces Sannyasa, she is certainly not a woman, she is really a man.' He further used to say to Gaurdasi, 'I am pouring the water, you will make the clay.'"

28th March, 1913

It was morning. The disciple entered the inner apartment of the Holy Mother's house and found her cutting the Kalmi green. Seeing her cutting something else also along with it, he said, "What is this that you are cutting up with the Kalmi green?" "This is grass," the Mother said, "this is also a kind of green. The complexion of Krishna was like this grass."

The disciple was seated for his midday meal. Radhu's mother arranged a leaf-plate and a cup of water in the verandah of her house for another guest, perhaps one of her relatives. A cat drank a little water out of the cup, so Radhu's mother changed the water. The cat again drank some of the water, and again she changed it. A third time the cat drank, whereupon Radhu's mother chased it and screamed, "You rogue, you burnt-faced cat, I will kill you!" It was the hot season. The Holy Mother was there. She

said, "No, no, you must not prevent a thirsty animal from drinking. Besides, the cat has already touched the water." At this Radhu's mother shouted in anger, "You don't have to become compassionate towards the cat. You have shown enough compassion towards man! Why not reserve your kindness for man?"

The Mother said in a serious voice, "He is unfortunate, indeed, who does not gain my compassion. I do not know anyone, not even an insect, for whom I do not feel compassion."

The disciple was seated for the evening meal. The Mother herself had cooked a curry, potatoes and other vegetables. She gave some of them to the disciple and said, "Eat and tell me how you like."

Disciple: This is patient's diet. Who cooked it?

Mother: I myself.

Disciple: You yourself?

Mother: Yes.

Disciple: Well, it could be done better. It is not exactly to the taste of people of our part of the country.

Mother: You had better taste a little of the liquid portion.

Nalini: O aunt, you never put any red chilly in your curry. Can anybody relish it?

Mother (to Nalini): Don't listen to him. (Addressing the disciple) When you eat it, you will find it tastes good.

Disciple: For some days past I have been asking about the curries you prepare and I have tasted some of them, but they all taste alike.

Mother: Very well, one day I shall cook as they do in your part of the country. You must show me how to cook. I am sure you add a lot of chillies. Is it not so?

Disciple: Not so much. But a curry does not necessarily taste bad because it is not made very hot.

Mother (to Nalini): Bring some gram tomorrow. I shall make some soup. I used to cook very well; now I am out of practice. At Kamarpukur, Lakshmi's mother and I used to cook. She could cook very well.

12th May, 1913

Radhu was indisposed, being laid up with pain and fever. Her eccentric mother began to scold the Holy Mother, saying, "You are about to kill my daughter with medicines." As she kept on scolding, she lost all control over her tongue. Varada was called in. He chased Radhu's mother out of the house. The Holy Mother, too, could bear it no longer. She spoke some sharp words to Radhu's mother and then said, addressing the disciple, "I was married to a husband who never addressed me as *tui* (denoting an inferior person). . . . And look at this Radhu's mother! How she abuses me day and night! I do not know what sin I committed to deserve all this. Perhaps I worshipped Siva with thorny Bilva leaf. That thorn has now become this thorn of a Radhu's mother."

Referring to Radhu's illness, the Holy Mother said, "My mind does not dwell upon Radhu even in the slightest degree. I am sick of her illness. I force my mind upon her. I pray to the Master, saying, 'O Lord, please divert my mind a little to Radhu. Otherwise who will look after her?' I have never seen such illness. Perhaps in her former birth she died of an illness for which she had not performed any penance. If a man dies of a particular illness without doing the necessary penance, he gets the same illness in his next birth;[1] but this rule does not apply to a holy man."

Not good to die of an illness without doing penance for it

Kedar's mother: The monk dies repeating the Name of God and therefore he attains to God.

Mother: Yes, that's true. The other day a young man died at Koalpara. Will he be reborn? No. This was his last birth.

At the time of his illness at Cossipore, the Master once remarked, "I am ill. The officers of the Kali temple may criticize me for not performing any penance." Then addressing Ramlal he said, "Take these ten rupees and go to Dakshineswar. Offer the money to Mother Kali and distribute it among the Brahmins and others." A Sadhu is not entitled to

[1] The idea is that an illness is brought about by one's evil Karma. In the case of the last illness, it may be that one dies before the Karma is fully exhausted, and in that case, one may have to suffer for that residuary Karma in the next birth, the suffering taking the shape of the same old disease. Hence one should perform penance, charity, worship, etc. as atonement for one's sinful Karma during one's last illness, and thus one gets over the effects of that Karma.

perform any ritual. Therefore the Master asked Ramlal to offer the money to his Chosen Deity and later on distribute it among the Brahmins and others. In ancient times the hermits and Rishis used to live in the forest. Could they perform penances like the Chandrayana? They used only to offer fruits and roots to their Chosen Ideal and later on distribute them among the needy. That was enough for them.

Radhu's Mother: My aunt died of a certain illness. Do you mean to say she has been born again with that illness?

Mother: Do you think that your aunt has not been reborn? Certainly she has again taken birth and inherited that illness as well. Many a time a man born in a particular family takes birth and dies again and again in the same family as a result of his Karma.

8th June, 1913

The Master in relation to one's Ishta Devata

Surendranath Bhaumick and Dr. Durga Prasad had been staying at the house of the Holy Mother. They would depart that afternoon. In the morning, after their bath, they came to the Holy Mother and saluted her. She blessed them by placing her hand on their heads and asked them to take their seats. After the exchange of a word or two Surendra said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, while worshipping the Master I find one difficulty. Suppose a devotee has a general belief that his Ishta

Devata and the Master are one and the same. He worships the Goddess through the image of the Master. Afterwards he surrenders the fruits of the Japa to the image of the Master, uttering the words, 'O Great Goddess, through Thy grace,' and so forth. This creates a confusion in my mind." The Mother said with a smile, "Don't worry, my child. Our Master alone is Mahesvara (Supreme God) and Mahesvari (Supreme Goddess) as well. He alone is the embodiment of all Deities. He alone is the embodiment of all mystic syllables. One can worship through him all Gods and Goddesses. You can address him as Mahesvara as well as Mahesvari."

Surendra: Mother, I cannot concentrate my mind in meditation at all.

Look at the Master's picture if you cannot concentrate

Mother: It does not matter much. It will be enough if you look at the picture of the Master. The Master was ill at Cossipore. The young disciples used to attend on him by turn. Gopal also was there. One day instead of serving the Master he went for meditation. He meditated for a long time. When Girish Babu heard of it, he remarked, "The one upon whom he is meditating with closed eyes is suffering on a sick-bed and, fancy, he is meditating upon him!" Gopal was sent for. The Master asked him to stroke his legs. He said to him, "Do you think I am asking you to stroke my legs because they are aching? Oh, no! In your previous births you did many virtuous acts; therefore I am

accepting your service." Look at the picture of Sri Ramakrishna, and that will be enough.

Surendra: Mother, I do not succeed in regularly counting the beads three times a day.

Mother: If you don't, think of the Master, perform your Japa whenever you can; at least you can salute him mentally, can't you?

Durga Babu: Mother, I do not quite understand what rules one should observe regarding one's food.

How far should one observe rules of purity regarding food?

Mother: The Master was very particular about one thing in regard to food. He used to forbid all the devotees from eating the food of the Sraddha ceremony. He used to say it injured one's devotion. Apart from this you may eat what you like, but remember the Master when you do so.

Durga Babu: Mother, while performing my duties in the hospital, many a time I feel thirsty. I feel compelled to drink water irrespective of place and persons. As a matter of fact, I do so. What do you say to that, Mother?

Mother: What else can you do? You do it in connection with the discharge of your duty. Remember the Master while you drink the water. As you do this while on duty, it will not injure you. Is it ever possible for those who are called upon to perform various odd duties to observe all religious injunctions regarding food?[1]

[1] This part of the conversation is to be understood in the light of the injunctions of the Hindu Scriptures on the purity

Surendra: You see, Mother, we householders live in families with many relations. Sometimes it happens that while the food is being cooked, some members of the family partake of it; later on that food is brought to me. I hesitate to offer that food to God.

Mother: That is inevitable in the case of householders. We also have to face similar situations. Take an instance: there may be a sick person in the family. Part of the food may be kept aside for him. But when food is placed on the plate, remember the Master, think that he himself has given this food, and eat it. Then it will not have any injurious effect on the growth of devotion.

Surendra: Mother, how can I describe to you my mental condition? You are the inner guide. You understand everything. I have been undergoing all the sufferings for the last few years. But for your

of the food consumed by spiritual aspirants. In so far as the vital energies of the body are renovated by the food consumed, and in so far as the vital energies condition the functioning of the mind, the food taken in has an effect on the state of one's mind. Food is contaminated or made impure not only by hygienic causes, but also by its quality and contacts. Certain food-stuffs are condemned because they are obtained by injuring other creatures or from experience found to lead to mental excitement. The motive and character of the giver, as also of the person preparing it, are said to make food impure. In later times these ethical and spiritual injunctions became petrified into rigid caste rules in the matter of interdining. The Holy Mother does not seem to favour these caste rules very much, but accepts the validity of the original spiritual principles behind them. The Sraddha food is condemned, because the sins of the dead are supposed to contaminate it.

blessings I would perhaps have been dead by this time.

Mother: Yes, my child, you do not have to tell me of the sufferings in the life of the world. There is no limit to it. In your case it is inevitable. Look at me, my child. What sort of life I am leading by the will of the Master! How much I am suffering on account of this girl (referring to Radhu)!

Surendra: Yes, Mother, your condition gives us consolation and hope. You yourself know the sufferings of the world; therefore we can expect your compassion.

Mother: Don't be afraid, my child. The Master is there. He alone will protect you, both here and hereafter.

Surendra: Mother, we are living so far away. Are dreams real?

Mother: Yes, they are. Dreams regarding the Master are real, but he forbade his disciples to narrate, even to him, dreams regarding himself.

Surendra: Mother, we do not know what the Master was like. We have not seen him. So for us you are the Master and everything else.

Mother: Don't fear, my child. The Master will look after you. He will watch over you here and hereafter. He will protect you always.

After the meal the two devotees took leave. Uncle Varada accompanied them. He was going to Calcutta. The Holy Mother walked part of the way with them and looked on until they disappeared.

Surendra was the head-master of a school at Ballaratanganj. Some butchers of that place used to flay cows alive. One day the rogues did so in front of the school. Surendra, the other teachers and the students—Hindus and Mussalmans alike—made a strong protest. The butchers were beaten. This created some trouble. Surendra was threatened by the butchers. At this time several students of the school were preparing to leave for Jayrambati for taking initiation. Surendra sent a letter to the Holy Mother through them. The boys also narrated the incident to her. She was extremely shocked and said, " If you do not protest against such an act, who will do so? " According to her instruction a letter was written to Surendra giving him assurance and encouragement. Further, he was asked to see that a repetition of such cruel action did not take place. Later on the Holy Mother again wrote to Surendra, saying, " If God really exists, then He shall certainly redress the grievance." Some time later a law-suit was filed, and as a result butchery of that heinous kind was stopped.

14th July, 1913

The disciple and Mukunda were seated in the porch of the Holy Mother's house for their midday meal. The Mother was seated in the porch of the adjoining house. Nalini arrived dressed in white. She had taken her bath, because a crow had dropped filth on her.

Obsession regarding purity is the sign of an impure mind

Mother: I am an old woman now, but I have never heard of a crow dropping filth like that. Your mind is impure. Can the mind lose its purity without great sins? The sister of Krishna Bose had such obsessions. While bathing in the Ganges she would ask people whether the top of her head was under water. That is an obsession. As a result the mind never feels pure. An impure mind does not easily become pure. The more you emphasize your obsession the more obsessed you become. It is true of all things.

Disciple: I have seen Mahapurushji (Swami Shivananda) handle dogs and then go to the shrine room to worship the Master. Perhaps someone would pour a little water in his hand and he would sprinkle a few drops over his face. At that time Ganges water was used for everything.

Mother: It is quite different with them. How pure is their mind! It is the mind of the Sadhu. They are gods, indeed, who live on the bank of the Ganges. Can anyone but gods live on the bank of the Ganges? Sins committed daily are expiated by ablution in the Ganges.[1]

Nalini: Golap-Ma one day washed the bath room in the Udbodhan Office and then dressed fruits for offering in the shrine after merely changing her cloth. I said to her, "What is this, Golap-Didi? Go and bathe in the Ganges." Golap-Ma

[1] See the heading 'Ganges' in Index and Glossary.

said to me, "Why don't you do it, if you so desire?"

Mother: How pure is Golap's mind! How high-souled she is! Therefore she does not discriminate so much between pure and impure things. She does not at all bother about rules regarding external purity. This is her last birth. In order to acquire a mind like that you need a different body. Pure air blows for eight miles on both the banks of the Ganges. This air is the embodiment of Narayana. The mind is rendered pure as the result of much austerities. "God who is purity itself cannot be attained without austerities."

What else does one obtain by the realization of God? Does he grow two horns? No, his mind becomes pure, and through a pure mind one attains knowledge and spiritual awakening.

Disciple: There are devotees who surrender themselves to God, but do not practise austerities. Will they attain to this state?

Self-surrender and spiritual discipline

Mother: That they surrender themselves to God, that they live placing implicit trust in Him, is their spiritual discipline. Alas! Naren said, "Let me have millions of births, what do I fear?" It is true. Does a man of knowledge ever fear rebirth? He does not commit any sin. It is the ignorant person who is always seized with fear. He alone gets entangled. He becomes polluted by sin. For millions of births he suffers from endless miseries, he

undergoes infinite pains, and at last he craves for God.

Disciple: Yes, through experience he gets his lessons and then attains knowledge.

Mother: Yes, the calf makes the sound of 'Ham Hai, Ham Hai' (I am, I am). He makes the same sound even after drums and other instruments are made from his hide and entrails. At last he goes into the hand of a carder and then he makes the sound 'Tum Hai, Tum Hai' (it is Thou, it is Thou).[1]

18th September, 1913

God, the only solace in life

In the course of a letter to a devotee the Holy Mother wrote: "There is no happiness whatever in human birth. The world is verily filled with misery. Happiness here is only a name. He on whom the grace of the Master has fallen, alone knows him to be God Himself. And remember, that is the only happiness."

[1] The reference is to the following Parable of Sri Ramakrishna: So long as egotism is not eradicated, there is no salvation for man. Look at the young calf and the troubles that come upon it through egotism. As soon as it is born it cries 'Ham Hai, Ham Hai'—I am, I am. And look at the bitter experiences it has to pass through! For when it grows up, if it is an ox, it is yoked to the plough or made to drag heavily loaded carts; if a cow, it is kept tied to a post and is sometimes killed and eaten. In spite of all this suffering and even after its death, the animal does not lose its egotism; for the drums that are made out of its hide continue to give the same egotistic note 'Ham'. At last it learns humility when the cotton carder makes bow-strings out of its entrails. For then through the bow-strings it sings 'Tu Hai', 'Tu Hai'—Thou Art, Thou Art. The 'I' must go and give place to 'Thou'. This does not happen until the man becomes spiritually awakened.

A Sannyasin's duty

A Sannyasin disciple had gone to Rishikesh, visiting the Holy Mother at Jayrambati on the way. In a few days he wrote to the Mother, saying, "Mother, once you remarked that I would get the vision of the Master in course of time but that has not happened as yet." Hearing the contents of the letter the Mother said to the disciple, "Write to him: 'Sri Ramakrishna has not gone to Rishikesh for your sake or simply because you are there.' He has become a Sannyasin. What else is he to do but call upon God? He will reveal Himself to the devotee when it is His sweet will."

Pray to the Lord

A woman wrote to the Mother, "Mother, I am young in years. My father-in-law and mother-in-law do not allow me to go to you. How can I go against their will? It is my desire to receive your blessing." The Mother asked the disciple to write to her, "Child, you need not come here. Call on the Lord who pervades the entire Universe. He will shower His blessings upon you."

30th September, 1918

A devotee in a fit of pique with God

It was morning. The Holy Mother was dressing fruits for the worship. The disciple was reading to her a letter written by a devotee. He had written in such a strain that it seemed as if he were piqued with God. The Mother dictated the reply: "The Master used to say, 'Sages like Suka and

Vyasa were at best big ants.' God has this infinite creation. If you do not pray to God, what does it matter to Him? There are many, many people who do not even think of God. If you do not call on Him, it is your misfortune. Such is the Divine Maya that He has thus made people forget Him. He feels, 'They are quite all right, let them be.'"

Disciple: Mother, it is not that people do not want to see God. Otherwise why should such a question arise in their mind at all? The thing is that they feel greatly hurt that God, whom they like to feel as their very 'own', moves away from them. Buddha, Chaitanya, Jesus Christ and others like them did so much for their devotees in order to insure their welfare.

Mother: That was also the attitude of our Master. It is not possible for me always to recollect all the devotees. I say to the Master, "O Lord, please bless all, wherever they may be. I cannot remember everyone." And see, it is he who is doing everything. Otherwise why should so many people come?

Disciple: That is true, indeed. It is rather easy for men to believe Kali, Durga and other Deities to be God, but is it easy to accept a man as God?

Mother: That depends upon His grace.

Grace of God compared to sun's rays

A day later a devotee arrived. The disciple said to the Mother, "Mother, it is this devotee who wrote to you that letter." The Mother said, "Is it so? I see he is a good boy." Then she said to the

devotee, "You see, it is the nature of water to flow downwards, but the sun's rays lift it up towards the sky; likewise it is the very nature of mind to go to lower things, to objects of enjoyment, but the grace of God can make the mind go towards higher objects."

Why man does not see God

It was about half past ten in the morning. A householder devotee arrived and saluted the Mother. "Mother," said he, "why do I not see the Master?" The Mother said, "Continue to pray without losing your heart. Everything will happen in time. For how many cycles did the Munis and Rishis of old practise austerities to realize God, and do you believe you will attain to Him in a flash? If not in this life, you will attain to Him in the next. If not in the next, it will be after that. Is it so easy to realize God? But this time the Master has shown an easy path; therefore it will be possible for all to realize God."

After the devotee left her, the Mother said, "He is so deeply engrossed in worldliness. He is the father of scores of children and still he says, 'Why do I not see the Master?' Many women used to come to the Master. They would say to him, 'Why can't we concentrate our mind upon God? Why can't we steady our mind?' and things like that. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell them, 'You still smell of the lying-in room. First get rid of that smell. Why are you so worried about God-realization now? Everything will happen in course of time. In this life we

have met. In the next we shall again meet and then you will attain to your goal.' It is easy to see a person as long as he lives in the body. I am now living here, so one can see me by merely coming here. How few have the good fortune to see the Master now with physical eyes! Vijaya Goswami had seen the Master at Dacca. He felt his body. At that the Master said, 'That my soul goes out is not good; perhaps this body will not last for many more days.'

"Can you tell me who has seen God? He made Naren attain to God-realization. Suka, Vyasa and Siva are like big ants at the most; they had glimpses of Him. One may see a vision in dream, but to see God in a physical form is a matter of rare good fortune.

Japa of a pure-minded devotee

(Excitedly) "Why can't one meditate if one has a pure mind? Why should one not be able to see God? When a pure soul performs Japa, he feels as if the holy Name bubbles up spontaneously from within himself. He does not make an effort to repeat the Name. One should practise Japa and meditation at regular times, giving up idleness. While living at Dakshineswar I used to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and practise Japa and meditation. One day I felt a little indisposed and left the bed rather late. The next day I woke up still late through laziness. Gradually I found that I did not feel inclined to get up early at all. Then I said to myself, 'Ah, at last I

have fallen a victim to idleness.' Thereupon I began to force myself to get up early. Gradually I got back my former habit. In such matters one should keep up the practice with unyielding resolution.

Youth is the proper time for spiritual practices

"Austerities, worship, pilgrimage, the earning of money—one should do all these in the days of youth. You see, even I had visited so many places at Banaras and Brindaban on foot in my early years, but now I need a palanquin to go even a few feet. I lean upon others. In old age the body deteriorates. It does not possess any strength. The mind loses its vigour. Is it possible to do anything at that time? It is quite right that the young Sannyasins of our Math have been directing their mind to God from an early age. This is the right time for them to do so. (To the disciple) My child, austerities or worship, practise all these things right now. Will these things be possible later on? Whatever you want to achieve, achieve it now; this is the right time."

Disciple: Lucky indeed are those who receive your blessings now. Those who come later on cannot have this rare opportunity.

Mother: What do you mean? Do you mean to say they will not succeed? God exists always everywhere. The Master is always there. They will succeed through his grace. Are not people of other countries making spiritual progress?

Disciple: The mind feels longing when it knows that it is loved, but do you really love us?

Mother: Do I not love you? I love even those who do a little for me, and you are doing so much. Whenever I touch anything at home, I remember you. I often think of those of you who are with me, and as for those who live far away, I say to the Master, "O Lord, please look after them. I cannot always remember them."

October, 1918

Japa steadies the mind and directs it to God

The Mother was seated on her bedstead. The disciple was reading to her the letters of her devotees. Krishnalal Maharaj was also there. The letters contained such statements as "The mind cannot be concentrated, etc." The Holy Mother listened to these and said in a rather animated voice, "The mind will be steadied if one repeats the Name of God fifteen or twenty thousand times a day. It is truly so. O Krishnalal, I myself have experienced it. Let them practise it first; if they fail, let them complain. One should practise Japa with some devotion, but this is not done. They will not do anything, they will only complain, saying, 'Why do I not succeed?'"

A devotee entered the room and asked the Mother about meditation and Japa. She said, "Repeating the Name of God a fixed number of times, telling the rosary or counting on fingers, is calculated to direct the mind to God. The natural tendency of the mind is to run this way and that way. Through these

means it is attracted to God. While repeating the Name of God, if one sees His form and becomes absorbed in Him, one's Japa stops. One gets everything when one succeeds in meditation.

" The mind is by nature restless. Therefore at the outset, to make the mind steady, one may practise meditation by regulating the breathing a little. That helps to steady the mind. But one must not overdo it. That heats the brain. You may talk of the vision of God or of meditation, but remember, mind is everything. One gets everything when the mind becomes steady.

" It is quite natural that man forgets God. Therefore whenever the need arises, God Himself incarnates on earth and shows the path by Himself practising Sadhana. This time He has also shown the example of renunciation."

CHAPTER XXII

CONVERSATIONS—THIRD SERIES

(Being pages from the diaries of several disciples, monastic and lay)

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES IN GENERAL

THE following are the notes of a series of conversations that a monastic disciple had with the Holy Mother on spiritual practices in general:

Pranayama, pilgrimage and Kundalini

Disciple: Mother, is it good to practise Asanas (Yogic postures) and Pranayamas (breathing exercises)?

Mother: These practices lead to supernatural powers, which deflect a man from the spiritual path.

Disciple: Is it good to be going about from one place of pilgrimage to another?

Mother: If the mind feels at rest in a particular place, there is no need of pilgrimage.

Disciple: I find it impossible to meditate. Please awaken my Kundalini.

Mother: It will awaken in course of time. Do Japa and meditation. It does not rise of itself. Continuous meditation will make the mind so steady that you will not feel inclined to give it up. When the

mind is not in a mood to meditate, do not force it to do so. In such conditions, get up from the seat of meditation after making prostrations. Real meditation is of a spontaneous nature.

Mental distraction and Japa

Disciple: Mother, why is it that the mind does not become steady? When I try to think of God, I find the mind drawn towards other objects.

Mother: It is wrong if the mind is drawn towards secular objects. By 'secular objects' is meant money, family, etc. But it is natural for it to think of work in which one is engaged. If meditation is not possible, do Japa. Realization will come through Japa. If the meditative mood comes, well and good, but by no means do it by force.

Place for spiritual practice

Disciple: Is it better to do spiritual practices staying at the Math or Banaras than in a solitary place?

Mother: If you undergo spiritual practices for some time in a solitary place such as Rishikesh, you will find that your mind has become strong, and then you can live in any place or society without being in the least affected by it. When the plant is tender, it should be hedged round. But if it is grown up, cows and goats can do it no harm. Spiritual practices in a lonely place are very essential. Pray to God with tears in your eyes whenever you want illumination or find yourself faced with any doubt or difficulty. The Lord will remove all your impurities, assuage your mental anguish, and give you enlightenment.

Work and spiritual practice

Disciple: I am too weak for undergoing spiritual practices. I have taken shelter at your feet. Please do whatever is necessary for my uplift.

With folded hands the Mother began praying to the Master: "May the Master preserve your spirit of renunciation!" Then she added, "He is taking care of you. You have no room for fear. Do the Master's work, and along with that practice spiritual disciplines too. Work helps one to keep off idle thoughts. If one is without any work, such thoughts rush into one's mind."

Practice of Asanas and Pranayama

Disciple: I have been practising postures (Asanas) for some days to keep my health in good condition. These postures help one in digesting food and in practising continence.

Mother: Be a little careful about it. If you continue such exercises for a long time, the mind may be diverted to the body. Again, if you give it up, it may affect your health. Therefore you should exercise your discretion.

Disciple: Mother, I practise it for only five or ten minutes for good digestion.

Mother: That's all right. I warned you because, if you practise any exercise and then give it up, it may ultimately impair your health. I bless you, my child, that you may realize God-consciousness.

Disciple: I am practising a little Pranayama too. Shall I continue it?

Mother: Yes, you may do a little. But don't go to an excess and heat your brain and nervous system. If the mind becomes quiet of itself, then what is the need of Pranayama?

Disciple: Nothing is gained, Mother, without the awakening of the Kundalini.

Kundalini awakening and Japa

Mother: Quite so, my child. The Kundalini will gradually be awakened. You will realize everything by the repetition of God's Name. Even if the mind be not quiet, still you can sit at a place and repeat the holy Name a million times. Before the awakening of the Kundalini, one hears the Anahata sound; but nothing can be achieved without the grace of the Divine Mother. In the small hours of the morning, I was thinking that perhaps I might not be able to get a vision of Siva. You know that in the temple of Banaras[1] the image of Siva is very small. It is under water, covered with flowers and Bilva leaves. One can scarcely see the image. No sooner had this idea flashed in my mind than I clearly saw the stone image of Siva, of very dark hue. I at once discovered that it was Visvanath Himself whom we worship in the temple. A devotee was passing her hand over the top of the image. I also quickly put my hand on the image.

Disciple: Mother, the stone image does not satisfy us any longer.

[1] This conversation took place at Banaras.

Mother: Why do you say so, my child? How many hopeless sinners come to Banaras and attain liberation by touching the image of Siva! And He, the Great God, carries on His shoulder the iniquities of all, without any murmur.

Disciple: What kind of place is suited for spiritual practices and how should one engage oneself in them?

Mother: Banaras is the place for you. Spiritual practices are meant to keep the mind steady at the feet of God, to keep it immersed in His thought. Repeat His Name.

Disciple: What is the aim of life?

Mother: To realize God and to remain immersed in His contemplation. You are Sannyasins, you are His own. He takes care of your spiritual welfare both here and hereafter. What then is there for you to worry about? Is it possible to contemplate on God always? Sometimes work; at other times think of God.

Aim of life

Disciple: Mother, please give me your blessings that I may have deep meditation and remain absorbed in the thought of God.

She blessed me by putting her hand on my head and said, "Always discriminate between the real and the unreal."

Disciple: Mother, it is easy to practise discrimination in a theoretical way, but we forget it when the time comes for its actual application. It fails us at such times. Please give me power so that I can

keep myself in the right path at those critical moments.

Mother: My child, may Sri Ramakrishna protect you always! May you attain knowledge and wisdom!

Disciple: Mother, so many days have passed away, but I have realized nothing.

Mother: God has been gracious to withdraw your mind from the noise and turmoil of the world and keep it steady at His feet. Is it a trifle? Swami Yogananda used to say, "We may not be able to practise meditation and prayer to our heart's content, but we are free from the anxieties of the world." Look at me. I am suffering a great deal on account of this Radhu.

Disciple: It is my desire to spend some time in spiritual exercises in the solitude of a garden.

Mother: Quite right. This is the proper time to do so. This is just the proper age for you to undergo these disciplines. You must practise them, but always be careful about your food. Swami Yogananda practised great austerity and as a result suffered much and passed away early in life.

* * *

Guru and God

One day in the course of conversation a woman disciple asked the Mother as to how she might look upon her. The Mother said, "You may think of me as Radha or in any other way that appeals to your mind. It will be enough if you think of me even as your mother."

Visions and spiritual unfoldment

The disciple said to the Mother, "Many devotees see visions, but I have not seen any." The Mother said, "These are very trifling things." This filled the disciple's mind with hope. She asked the Mother whether she would have her spiritual unfoldment. "Surely," said the Mother with emphasis, "you will have it in course of time."

Worship and duties

In answer to the request of the disciple that she might be allowed to do Puja (ritualistic worship) to the Master, the Mother said, "You have your household duties to attend to. You will not be able to do worship. Pray to the Master, he will do everything for you. He is your own, as the moon is the uncle of all children."

* * *

A devotee once asked the Mother, "Mother, what should be our mode of life?"

Mother: You spend your life in the same way as you are doing now. Pray to Him earnestly. Think of Him always.

Spiritual fall, egotism, and Divine will

Devotee: Mother, I am overtaken by fear on seeing how even high spiritual persons meet with fall.

Mother: If you are constantly in touch with objects of enjoyment, you are likely to succumb to their influence.

Devotee: Man cannot do anything by his individual effort. God is doing everything through him.

Mother: Yes, that is true. But is one conscious of this always? Blinded by egotism, people think themselves to be independent agents in regard to action. They do not depend on God. He protects one who relies on Him.

* * *

A monastic disciple asked the Holy Mother, "Mother, does one who has been blessed by you as Guru need any spiritual discipline?"

Mother: That is true. But the real point is this: the room may contain different kinds of food-stuff, but one must cook them. He who cooks earlier gets his meal earlier too. Some eat in the morning, some others in the evening, and there are yet others who fast because they are too lazy to cook.

The need of spiritual disciplines

Disciple: Mother, I do not understand what you have said.

Mother: The more intensely a person practises spiritual disciplines, the more quickly he attains God. But even if he does not practise any spiritual disciplines, he will attain Him in the end—surely he will. Only he who spends his time idly, without practising prayer and meditation, will take a long time to attain Him. You have renounced the world to practise spiritual disciplines. As you cannot always do them, it is necessary for you to do work also, looking upon it as having been entrusted to you by the Master. For you, too austere a life is not advisable. You

suffer from colic. Be careful about your food. It is not a fatal disease, but it is painful.

* * *

Knowledge of Brahman

One day a disciple asked the Mother, "Mother, how does one attain the knowledge of Brahman? Should one practise it step by step or does it happen spontaneously?" The Mother said, "The path of Brahman is very difficult. You pray to the Master and he will give you the knowledge of Brahman in proper time."

* * *

Control of mind

At Koalpara a disciple said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, the mind is very restless. I can steady it in no way." In reply the Mother said, "As wind removes the cloud, so the Name of God destroys the cloud of worldliness."

That day the Holy Mother said to another disciple, when he complained to her about the weakness of his mind, "Can anyone altogether destroy lust? A little of it remains as long as one has the body, but it can be subdued, as a snake can be subdued by charmed dust."

* * *

Faith and scholarship

Regarding faith in God, the Holy Mother once remarked, "Does one get faith by mere study of books? Too much reading creates confusion. The Master used to say that one should learn from the Scriptures that God alone is real and the world illusory. Suppose I write to you a letter asking you

to bring certain things for me. How long do you need the letter? So long as you do not know its contents. But when you have known the contents of the letter, do you need the letter any longer? Then you will procure those things and come to me. On the other hand, what is the good of reading the letter day and night?"

* * *

Way to liberation

One day in the course of conversation a disciple said to the Mother, "It is not possible to achieve anything in the worldly life." In reply the Mother said, "My child, this world is like a deep marshy place. Once a man gets entangled there, it becomes very difficult for him to come out. Even Brahma and Vishnu lose their wits in the world. What to speak of men! Repeat the Name of God. If you do so, He will cut away your bondage some day. Can anyone get liberation, my child, unless He Himself removes the shackles? Have deep faith in God. Look upon the Master as your refuge, even as children regard their parents."

* * *

Resignation and spiritual progress

Once at Jayrambati a disciple asked the Mother, "Mother, everybody says that we must pray for something under a Kalpataru. But we are your children. What special wish should children express before the Mother? The Mother knows what is good for her children, and she always gives them what is good for them. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say,

'The Mother cooks for children different dishes according to their power of digestion.' Now, Mother, please tell that which would be most beneficial for me."

Mother: How little intelligence does a man possess! He may require one thing, but he asks for another. He starts to mould an image of Siva and often ends by making that of a monkey. It is best therefore to surrender all desires at the feet of God. He will do whatever is best for us. But one may pray for devotion and detachment. These cannot be classed as desires.

* * *

Absence of earnestness in spiritual life

One day the Holy Mother received many letters from her devotees. In the evening the disciple read those letters to her. After hearing the contents, the Mother said, "Do you notice how many different desires have been expressed by these children? Some write, 'We have been practising so much of Japa, meditation and prayer, but we are not achieving anything.' Again others write about their sufferings and sorrows, their poverty and worries in the world. I cannot listen to these any more. I always pray to the Master, saying, 'O Lord, please do protect them always here and hereafter.' What else can I, their mother, pray for? But how many are there who truly want to realize God? Where is that earnestness? They, no doubt, profess great devotion and longing, but they feel satisfied when

they get even a tiny bit of enjoyment. They say, 'Ah, how kind is God!' Some devotees write to me inquiring about Radhu. Before anything else they ask about Radhu, only to humour me. No one will even cast a look at her after I finally close my eyes."

Liberation and devotion

One day the disciple asked the Holy Mother regarding Mukti (liberation) and Bhakti (the love of God). The Mother said, "As regards liberation, it can be given any moment, but God does not want to give Bhakti so easily." She uttered these words in such a way that it seemed as if the gift of liberation was in the palm of her hand. But immediately she changed the topic of conversation.

* * *

Longing for God

Once at Jayrambati a calf was crying in the compound of the Holy Mother's house in the early hours of the morning. It had been separated from its dam, which was going to be milked. On hearing the cries of the calf, the Mother hurried towards it, saying, "Wait, I shall untie you now." So saying, she untied the calf. The disciple was astonished to notice the very tender look on the Mother's face at that time. He found in her the very embodiment of compassion. Ah! could we but cry to God like that calf! Certainly He would then release us from all worldly bondage.

WORK AND MEDITATION

Combine work with meditation

The conversation went on until late at night. A disciple said to the Mother, "K— says to us, 'Labour hard to fulfil your duties, and then you will achieve everything as ordained by God.'" The Holy Mother said in reply, "No doubt, you must do your duties. It keeps one's mind in good condition. But it is also very necessary to practise Japa, meditation and prayer. One must practise these disciplines at least in the morning and the evening. Such practice is like the rudder of a boat. When a person sits in the evening for prayer, he can reflect on the good and bad things he did in the course of the day. Then he should compare the mental state of that day with that of the previous one. Next, while performing Japa he should meditate on his Chosen Ideal. In meditation he should first think of the face of his Chosen Deity, but he should meditate on the entire body from the feet upward. Unless you practise meditation in the morning and evening side by side with your work, how can you know whether you are doing the desirable or undesirable thing?"

Dangers of an exclusive life of meditation

The disciple said, "Some say that one achieves nothing through work. One can succeed in spiritual life only through Japa and meditation." The Mother said in reply, "How have they known as to what will give success and what will not? Does

one achieve everything by practising Japa and meditation for a few days? Nothing whatsoever is achieved unless Mahamaya clears the path. Didn't you notice the other day that a person's brain became deranged, because he forced himself to excessive prayer and meditation? If one's head becomes deranged, one's life becomes useless. The intelligence of man is very precarious. It is like the thread of a screw. If one thread is loosened, then he goes crazy. Or he becomes entangled in the trap of Mahamaya and thinks himself to be very intelligent. He feels that he is quite all right. But if the screw is tightened in a different direction, one follows the right path and enjoys peace and happiness. One should always recollect God and pray to him for right understanding. How many are there who can meditate and practise Japa all the time? At first they earnestly practise these disciplines, but like N— their brains become heated in the long run by sitting constantly on their prayer rugs. They become very vain. They also suffer from mental worries by reflecting on different things. It is much better to work than to allow the mind to roam at large. For when the mind gets a free scope to wander, it creates much confusion. My Naren (Swami Vivekananda) thought of these things and wisely founded institutions where people would do disinterested work." Referring to N—, the Holy Mother again said, " You see how he has made his mind impure by constantly sitting in one place? His fads and obsessions are

constantly increasing. He always complains of mental worries. Why should there be so much worry? Can't all these experiences make him sensible?"

* * *

Work as sacred as austerities

A disciple, who lived with the Holy Mother at her bidding, used always to be busy with worship in the chapel and other duties. Hearing that some monks of the Belur Math were going out to practise Tapasya (austerities), he said to the Mother, "I don't think it is good for me to be busy with all these duties. I want to practise austerities. Please give me your permission." The Mother said, "Why so, my child? You are now doing my work. You are devoting yourself to the Master's work. Are these in any way less spiritual than austerities? Why should you then abandon these works? If at any time you feel a strong inclination to practise austerities, you may go away for a month or two."

JAPA

Worship and Japa

A woman devotee once asked the Mother to teach her how to offer Puja (ritualistic worship) to the Master. The Mother said to her, "You lead a worldly life. You will not be able to do the worship. I have given you his Name. Practise Japa. Through that you will achieve everything."

* * *

A devotee asked the Holy Mother, "Is it of any use to be merely repeating His Name without intense devotion?"

How to practise Japa

Mother: Whether you jump into water or are pushed into it, your cloth will get drenched. Is it not so? Meditate every day, as your mind is yet immature. Constant meditation will make the mind one-pointed. Discriminate always between the real and the unreal. Whenever you find the mind drawn to any object, think of its transitoriness, and thus try to withdraw the mind back to the thought of God. A man was angling. A bridal party was going along the road with music. But the angler's eye remained fixed on the float. The mind of a spiritual aspirant should be steadfast like that.

* * *

A monastic disciple said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, it is my desire to select a place where I can practise spiritual disciplines, but my health is not good."

Mother: Now for some time engage yourself in a little work, but later on, when you feel a strong inclination to practise austerities, you may give up work.

Disciple: I practise Japa, but I cannot concentrate my mind.

Do a fixed number of Japa daily

Mother: Repeat the Name of God, whether your mind is concentrated or not. It will be good for you if you can repeat the Name of God a fixed number of times every day.

Disciple: Mother, shall I practise the repetition of the holy Name, keeping in mind a fixed number of repetitions?

Mother: If you repeat with an eye to number, your mind may be concentrated on the number alone; therefore I would advise you to repeat the Name of God without being particular about the number.

Disciple: Why is it that our mind is not absorbed in God when we repeat His Name?

Concentration and Japa

Mother: It will come in due course. Even if the mind be not concentrated, do not give up the repetition of the holy word. You do your duty. While repeating the Name, the mind will be fixed of itself on the ideal, like a candle flame in a place protected from the wind. It is the wind alone that makes the flame flicker. In the same way, our fancies and desires make our mind restless. Again, the concentration is delayed if one does not utter the holy word correctly. There was a woman who was asked by her teacher to repeat the sacred word 'Rukmininathaya'. The woman could not utter such a big word, so she would repeat 'Ruku, Ruku'. For that reason her progress was stopped for a few days, but later on, through the grace of God, she found the correct word.

* * *

While the Mother was staying at Jagadamba Ashram, Koalpara, she held the following conversation with a devotee:

Devotee: Should one wash one's face ceremonially before repeating the holy Name of God?

Mother: Yes, one should observe these rules when one happens to be in one's own house. But while one is in the street, one may repeat the Name mentally.

Devotee: Should we, in the second case, repeat only the Name of God, or the sacred word we get from our teacher as well?

Mother: Yes, you must repeat the sacred word also. Repeating the Name of God once, when the mind is controlled, is equivalent to a million repetitions when the mind is away from God. You may repeat the Name for the whole day, but if the mind be elsewhere, that does not produce much result. The repetition must be accompanied by concentration. Then alone one gets the grace of God.

Efficacy of Japa with concentration

Devotee: Is it sufficient if I continue the spiritual practices I am now doing or should I do something more?

Mother: Continue what you are doing now. Sri Ramakrishna has already accepted you as his own.

Devotee: It is said that one realizes God by praying to Him sincerely for two or three days. I have been praying for such a long time, but why do I not get any realization?

Mother: Everything will come in time, my child. The words of Sri Ramakrishna, which are as true as the words of Siva, can never be otherwise. Be

devoted to Him and take shelter at His feet. It is enough to remember that there is some one, call him father or mother, who is always protecting you.

Devotee: I have absolute faith in your words.

* * *

Once a disciple said to the Mother: "Mother, I cannot count the Japa while performing it with the beads. If my fingers move, my tongue remains silent. When my hands and tongue become active, the mind does not remain steady."

Mother: You will find later on that your fingers and tongue will remain inactive, but the mind will continue to think of God.

* * *

Japa on fingers

Once a devotee forgot how to count the repetitions of the Mantra on his fingers. He wrote to a disciple of the Mother to ask her about it. At this the Mother said, "What does it matter? It can be done in any way. The purpose of all this is to direct the mind towards God."

* * *

Regularity and time in spiritual practice

Regarding meditation and Japa, the Holy Mother said to a disciple, "It is very necessary to have a fixed time for these things. For it cannot be said when the auspicious moment will come. It arrives so suddenly. No one gets any hint of it beforehand. Therefore one should

observe regularity, however busy one may be with duties."

Disciple: There are periods of illness, and there are also moments when one is bothered by work. Therefore it is not always possible to observe regularity of time.

Mother: One has no control over illness, but even in the midst of the most intense activity, one should at least remember God and salute him.

Disciple: What is the best time?

Mother: The conjunction of day and night is the most auspicious time for calling on God. Night disappears and day arrives, or day disappears and night arrives—it is the conjunction of day and night. The mind remains pure at this time.

Regarding the weakness of mind, the Holy Mother said to the disciple, "Child, this is the law of nature. Have you not noticed the full moon and the new moon? Likewise the mind is sometimes dominated by good, and sometimes by bad, tendencies."

* * *

Japa while travelling

A certain disciple asked the Holy Mother at Jayrambati how he should practise Japa while travelling by train or steamer. At this she said, "Repeat the Mantra mentally. Gradually your fingers and tongue will stop functioning. Only the mind will work. The mind itself becomes the teacher in the end."

On a festive occasion an athlete was demonstrating various feats, one of which consisted in breaking a big stone placed on his chest. While it was being broken, the Mother was heard saying, "O Lord, save him! O Lord, save him!" After this performance the Mother asked me, "My child, do they know any Mantra, or have they any other secret?"

Disciple: No, Mother. It is nothing of that kind. It is the result of continued practice. I have heard the story of a man in America carrying a calf in his arms every day to the pasture ground. He went on with this practice every day until it grew into a big ox. Even after it had grown up, he could carry it with as much ease as in its early days. He used to make a display of this feat before all. These are all the results of practice.

Japa and spiritual progress

Mother: Yes, it is so. Just see the power of habit. In the same way man attains realization by continuous practice of Japa.

DIVINE GRACE

A certain Sannyasin of the Ramakrishna Order had been practising hard austerities at the Manikarnika Ghat at Banaras. When a disciple of the Mother was going to Calcutta, the monk told him, "Please ask the Mother when the grace of God will descend on me." When the disciple communicated this to the Mother,

Austerities and Divine grace

she said in a serious tone, "Please write to him that there is no such rule that the grace of God will fall on one simply because one is practising austerities. In olden days the Rishis practised austerities for thousands of years with their feet up and head down and a lighted fire burning under them. Even then, only some of them received the grace of God."

* * *

God cannot be purchased

A disciple said to the Mother, "Mother, I have practised austerities and Japa so much, but I have not achieved anything." In reply the Mother said, "God is not like fish or vegetables that you can buy Him for a price."

* * *

Slow operation of Divine grace

One day a disciple said to the Mother with great earnestness: "Mother, I am coming to you so frequently, and I have received your grace. But why have I not achieved anything? I feel that I am as I was before." In reply she said, "My child, suppose you are asleep on a bed, and some one removes you with the bed to another place. In that case will you know, immediately on waking, that you have come to a new place? Not at all. Only after your drowsiness clears away completely, you will know that you have come to a new place."

* * *

One day a disciple asked the Mother at Jayrambati, " Mother, how does one realize God ? Worship, Japa, meditation,—do these help one ? "

Mother : None of these can help.

Disciple : Then how does one get the vision of God ?

Mother : It is only through His grace. But one must practise meditation and Japa. That removes impurities of mind. One must practise spiritual disciplines such as worship and so forth. As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it, or as one gets the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, in the same way one gets spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God. But you can realize Him right now, if you become desireless.

Divine grace and spiritual practice

* * *

One day in 1901, the Holy Mother said to a monastic disciple, referring to spiritual disciplines, " Sit for meditation in the morning and the evening. Keep your head cool and practise meditation and prayer. It is very difficult to do so. It is rather easy to dig the earth with a spade." Looking at the picture of the Master, she said, " You will achieve nothing without his grace." The disciple told her that he could not practise meditation and prayer regularly on account of his being busy with the duties of the Ashrama. The Mother said in reply, " Whose works are these ? They all belong to Him." Continuing, the Mother said to him, " You will find later

Meditation, work, and Divine grace

on that the mind will become your Guru and give you instruction."

One day the Holy Mother said, "We have practised so much Japa, we have observed so many spiritual disciplines, but nothing whatsoever is of any avail. How can anyone get liberation unless Mahamaya leaves the path open? O man, take refuge in God! Take refuge in Him! Then alone Mahamaya will be gracious and pave the way for liberation." Then she narrated the following story from the Master's life at Kamarpukur: It was the month of Jaishtha. There came a heavy shower of rain in the evening and the fields got flooded. The Master was going to the woods wading through water. Many catfish were found there and people were killing them with stones. One fish moved round and round the feet of the Master. At this he said to the people: 'Please do not kill it. See how it has taken shelter at my feet! If any of you can, please put it in the tank Haldarpukur.' Then he himself took the fish to the pond and left it there. Coming home, he narrated the incident to us and said, 'It is only if one thus takes shelter in God, that one is saved.'"

* * *

Divine grace at death

A sannyasin disciple wrote to the Mother a letter full of despair. After hearing the contents of the letter she said seriously and forcibly: "How is that possible? Is the name of the Master a mere trifle? Those who have come here and think of the Master,

will certainly see their Chosen Ideal one day. If they are not able to do so during their lifetime, they will at least have His vision at the moment before their death."

LIFE OF PURITY AND RENUNCIATION

The glory of renunciation

A young man named Manasa came to the Holy Mother with the desire to receive initiation and the ochre robe from her. The Holy Mother gladly granted his request. That made him very happy. In the evening he was seated in the house of uncle Kali, singing songs in glorification of the Divine Mother. The Holy Mother liked those songs very much. Radhu, Maku, Nalini, one or two of her sisters-in-law and some other devotees were with her. One of her sisters-in-law said, "She has made this young man a Sadhu." Maku then commented, "That's true. See what our aunt has done. She makes these good young men embrace the monastic life. Their parents have brought them up with great suffering to themselves. All their expectations are centred round their children. What all hopes they would have entertained about them! All these are now shattered. And what will this young man do now? Either he will go to Rishikesh and beg his food, or he will clean the dirt and filth of the sick in the hospital. Why? To marry and settle down in life is also a form of religion. Well, aunt, if you thus

make these young men Sadhus, Mahamaya will be angry with you. If they want to be Sadhus, let them be so of themselves. Why should you be instrumental to their embracing the monastic life?" The Holy Mother said to her in reply, "Look here, Maku, these are all divine children. They will live in the world immaculate like unsmelt flowers. What can be nicer than that? You have seen for yourself what kind of happiness worldly life can give? What have you learned from me all these days! Why so much attraction for worldly life? Why so much animal propensity? What sort of happiness do you derive from it? Can you not even conceive in dream a pure ideal of life? Can't you live with your husband even now as brother and sister? Why this desire to lead a piggish life? This misery of the world has been gnawing into my bones." All present there were very much moved by the Holy Mother's appeal. Continuing she added, "An unmarried person who leads a pure life will advance towards Him with rapid strides, whether he prays to Him or not. The others, being tied hands and feet, find it difficult to extricate themselves from the bondage of worldliness, even though they try to think of God."

* * *

Advice to a monk's mother

One day the mother of a monk requested the Holy Mother to ask her son to go back to worldly life. The Holy Mother replied to her, "It is a rare good fortune to be the mother of a monk.

People cannot give up attachment even to a brass pot. Is it an easy thing to renounce the world? You are his mother. Why should you worry? Though he has become a Sadhu, he will look after you."

* * *

Exhortation to a wavering aspirant

Once a young disciple of the Mother received an unexpected marriage proposal from the house of a very wealthy man. He was offered a large sum of money, which could for ever remove his pecuniary wants. The young man, after having passed his M.A. examination, had become the headmaster of a school. His mind was not altogether free from desire for enjoyments. Therefore he sounded the Holy Mother to know what her opinion was about his marriage. Hearing everything, the Mother said, "My child, you are quite all right. Why do you desire to be burnt in the fire of worldliness? You are doing good work. Through your help many boys are receiving education. These students will benefit by association with you and grow into good men; that will be meritorious for you also." But the young man said, "Mother, my mind becomes restless now and then. It craves for enjoyments. That frightens me." The Mother said, "Don't be afraid. I tell you that in this Kali Yuga mental sin is no sin. Free your mind from all worries on this account. You need not be afraid." After hearing this assurance of the Holy Mother, the devotee never again thought of marriage,

nor did he allow his mind to be ruffled by momentary impulses.

* * *

Monastic life and household life

A woman devotee said to her, "Mother, all your children must be the same to you. But if one writes asking your opinion about his marriage, you permit him to marry; and again, if another wants to renounce the world, you give him a different type of instruction glorifying the life of renunciation. Is it not rather your duty to lead everyone along the best path?" The Mother said to her, "Suppose a man has intense desire for enjoyment. Do you think he will listen to me, if I forbid him to enjoy that desire? Again, suppose a man, as a result of his many meritorious actions in past births, has understood all these as freaks of Maya and regards God as the only real thing. Should I not help him a little? Is there any end of suffering in this life of the world?"

* * *

To a woman disciple, whose son was refusing to marry, the Holy Mother said: "Ah, all boys nowadays say that they do not want to marry. But, you see, those who belong to a very high plane of existence alone can take to the monastic life and free themselves from all bondages. Again there are some who are born to have a little taste of this worldly life. I say that one should see through worldly enjoyments. But it is quite a different thing with the disciples and companions of the Master."

Disciple: Mother, he (*i.e.* the disciple's son) is your son. His future happiness or suffering rests with you. Do whatever you like with him.

Marriage or renunciation?

Mother: I say, let him marry and finish all enjoyments in this life; otherwise there is no knowing when he may fall a victim to some unfulfilled desires. But you may be sure of this, that so long as he remains under the Master's protection he can never slip. You need not at all worry yourself on this account. I have given him a Mantra which the Master had communicated to me, and through which one reaches perfection. Can he ever come to grief?

* * *

In praise of internal renunciation

A disciple asked the Mother, "The Master said that those who would accept him as their spiritual ideal would not be born again. Again Swamiji said that no liberation is possible without being initiated into Sannyasa. What, then, will be the way out for the householders?" The Mother said in reply, "Yes, what the Master said is true, and what Swamiji said is also equally true. The householders have no need of external renunciation. They will spontaneously get the internal renunciation. But some people need external renunciation. Why should you be afraid? Surrender yourself to the Master and always remember that he stands behind."

THE IDEAL OF SANNYASA

The Mother once said to a Sadhu:

"Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'O Sadhu, beware!' Sadhus should always be alert. The path of a Sadhu is always slippery. While one is on slippery ground, one should walk tiptoe. Is it a joke to become a Sannyasin? If one had so desired, one could have married and lived the life of a householder. Now that you have given up such intentions, the mind should not be allowed to think of these things. What has been once spat out, is not eaten again. The ochre robe of a Sadhu protects him as the collar of a dog protects it from danger. No one molests a dog with a collar, as it belongs to someone or other. All gates are open to a Sadhu. He has admission everywhere. The mind naturally tends towards evil deeds. It is lethargic in doing good works. Formerly I used to get up at 3 a.m. and sit up for meditation. One day I felt disinclined to do so on account of physical indisposition. That one day's irregularity resulted in the upsetting of my routine for a number of days. That is why I tell that perseverance and tenacity are necessary for success in all good work. While I was living in the Nahabat at Dakshineswar, I used to pray in the moonlit night, 'O Lord, there is stain even in the moon. Let there be no stain in my mind.'"

Safeguards in a sannyasin's life

A monk should be above attachment and jealousy. He must be the same under all circumstances. Sri Ramakrishna used to say to Hriday, "You must bear with me and I must bear with you; then everything will go on well. Otherwise we shall have to summon the manager to make up our differences."

Freedom rom jealousy and attachment

* * *

K—was talking to the Mother. He said, "Mother, all your children are learned, but these beings (referring to the inmates of the Koalpara Ashrama) are your illiterate children. Sarat Maharaj has written books on the Master and these are everywhere spreading the Master's message and teachings. Your other children are giving lectures. So much is being done to spread Sri Ramakrishna's ideas." At this the Holy Mother said, "What do you mean? Our Master did not know much of reading and writing. The real thing is to have devotion to God. Through you much work will be done in this part of the country. The Master was born on earth this time to liberate all, the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate. The Malaya breeze is blowing here. He who will unfurl his sail and take refuge in the Master will be blessed indeed. This time all trees and plants, even those having only a little stamina—excepting perhaps the bamboo and the grass—will be transformed into sandalwood by the touch of this Malaya breeze. Why should you be worried? You

Scholarship and monastic life

are my own people. But remember this, that an educated Sadhu is like an elephant whose tusks are covered with gold." With these words she went into the shrine room.

ON KARMA

A disciple once asked the Holy Mother, "If God be the father and mother of all, then why does He make us commit sin?"

God, Karma and suffering

Mother: No doubt, God alone has become all these creatures, animate and inanimate, but in the relative world all beings act and suffer according to their past Karma and innate tendencies. The sun is, no doubt, one but his manifestation differs according to objects and places. . . .

Disciple: If everything happens according to the will of God, then why does He not annul the law of Karma?

Mother: Yes, if He wills, He can shorten the period of evolution. But we do not know His will. Even Sri Ramakrishna himself had to suffer from this law of Karma. One day his elder brother, being in a state of delirium, was about to drink water, which had been forbidden, when the Master snatched the glass from his hand. That irritated his brother who cursed him, saying, 'As you did not allow me to drink water, you also will be unable to eat anything during your last days.' Sri Ramakrishna said to him,

'Brother, I did so for your good only, and as a result you have cursed me.' At that his brother burst into tears and said, 'Well, dear, I do not know why I said so. I do not know why such words should have come out of my mouth.' Now you see, my child, during the Master's last illness he also had to suffer from the result of his past Karma. He could not eat anything.

* * *

Japa and mitigation of Karma

A devotee asked the Mother whether Prarabdha Karma[1] could be counteracted by the repetition of the Name of God.

Mother: One must experience the result of Prarabdha Karma. No one can escape it. But Japa or repetition of God's holy Name minimizes its intensity. It is like the case of a man who is destined to lose his leg, but instead suffers only from the prick of a thorn in his foot.

ON THE MASTER

His devotion to truth

The Mother once observed, "How devoted the Master was to truth! Alas, we cannot follow his example. The Master used to say that truth alone is Tapasya (austerity) in the Iron Age (Kali Yuga). One attains to God by sticking to truth."

[1] Karma or results o past actions is divided into three categories—Prarabdha, Agami and Sanchita. Prarabdha is that which has already begun to fructify; Agami is that which is ready to

His divinity

Referring to the Master, the Mother once told a devotee, "Really and truly he was God Himself. He assumed this human body to remove the sorrows and sufferings of others. He moved about in disguise, as a king walks through his city. He disappeared the moment he became known."

* * *

Food-offering to the Master

The Mother lived for some time in a rented house at Bosepara in Baghbazar for the treatment of Radhu. A disciple was also there to render personal service to the Mother. One day the Mother asked her (the disciple) to give the food-offering to the Master, but the disciple did not know the proper Mantra and other procedure. She said to the Mother, "I do not know how to offer food to the Master." The Mother said to her, "Look here, regard the Master as your own and pray to him, saying, 'Come here, take your seat and eat your food.' Further, think that he has come, has taken his seat, and is eating his meal. Does one really need a Mantra for serving one who is one's own? It is like receiving one's relatives as guests. The Master will accept your worship in whatever way you perform it." The

fructify; and Sanchita is that which is stored up or held in reserve. It is illustrated by a familiar example from archery. Prarabdha is like an arrow that has left the bow; it must strike the target. Agami is like an arrow that is attached to the bow string; it is ready to be released, but can be withheld. And Sanchita is like the arrows in the quiver; it is held in reserve.

Mother, however, taught the disciple a Mantra with which to offer food to the Master.

* * *

Prayer to the Master

By way of consoling a young mother who had lost her only daughter, the Holy Mother once said: "My daughter, what can I tell you? I do not know anything myself. Keep a picture of the Master before you, and know for certain that he is always with you. Open your grief-stricken heart to him. Shed tears and sincerely pray, 'O Lord, draw me towards you, give me peace of mind.' By doing so constantly you will gradually attain peace of mind. Have devotion for the Master, and whenever you are in distress, speak it out to him."

* * *

Prayer to the Master and attainment of ecstatic love

One evening Sister Sudhira and a girl disciple were seated near the Mother. The Mother said to them, "He who has really prayed to the Master, even once, has nothing to fear. By praying to him constantly one gets ecstatic love (Prema Bhakti) through his grace. This Prema, my child, is the innermost thing of spiritual life. The Gopis of Brindavan attained to it. They were not aware of anything else in the world excepting Sri Krishna. A line in one of Nilakantha's songs says, 'One should cherish with great care this precious jewel of Prema.'" The Mother sang the song. Then she added, "Ah, how sweet are Nilakantha's songs!

The Master loved them dearly. When he lived at Dakshineswar, Nilakantha used to come there now and then and sing for him. How happy we were there! How many people of different temperaments used to come to him! Dakshineswar at that time appeared to us as the mart of bliss."

* * *

Mantra and worship

A woman devotee once asked the Holy Mother, "Mother, many people regularly worship Siva. Can we also do so?" In reply the Holy Mother said, "The Mantra that I have given you contains everything. Through that you can worship Durga, Kali and all gods and goddesses. But if one likes, one can learn the worship of Siva. You don't need it. It only adds to one's worries."

The Holy Mother was asked about the procedure of offering food to the Master. She said, "There is no need of following rituals in offering food to the Master. The Mantra one gets from one's Guru is enough for everything."

EXHORTATIONS

To a young man of spiritual inclinations

A young man, who was a disciple of the Holy Mother, had gone to see her during her final illness. The Mother made enquiries about his mother and other relatives, and told him that she (the Holy

Mother) might not live long. The young man was much dejected at this and expressed his fear that he would be helpless in life without her. At this she exhorted him as follows: "Always remember that Sri Ramakrishna alone is our protector. If you forget this, you will find yourself in a maze. Do you know why I asked you today about your mother and other members of the family? Sometime back I heard about the death of your father from G—. Then I asked him if your mother had any other relatives and also about her means of livelihood. I further inquired if she were dependent upon you. Coming to learn that she could manage without you, I thought, 'That is good. This boy has pious intentions. Now through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, there will be no serious obstacle to prevent him from leading a spiritual life.' Everyone should serve his mother. It is all the more incumbent upon you, because you have all come to me with the purpose of dedicating your life to the service of others. Had your father not left any money for your mother, I would have asked you to earn money and look after her comfort. Through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, that obstacle has been removed. Simply see that the money left at her disposal is not wasted. Make some arrangement about it, and look after her as much as you can. Is it a small advantage for you? One cannot earn money in strictly honest ways. Money always taints the mind. For this reason I ask you to settle the pecuniary affairs of your mother as soon as possible.

Such is the fascination of money that if you involve yourself too much in it, you will feel attracted to it. You may think that you are above money and that you will never feel any attraction for it as you have once renounced it. You may further think that at any moment you may leave it behind. No, my child, never harbour this thought in your mind. Through a tiny little loop-hole it will enter into your mind and then strangle you gradually quite undetected. You will never know it. Especially as you belong to Calcutta, you know how money can draw people into reckless ways of living. Settle your mother's affairs as soon as possible and run away from Calcutta. Further, if you can persuade your mother to go to a holy place, you both can lead a spiritual life, forgetting your worldly relationship. Just now your mother is stricken with grief. I think this is the best arrangement. Your mother also is now quite advanced in years. Always talk to her about God. You will really fulfil the duty of a son if you can help her to gather the means for her ultimate journey. You have grown by sucking her milk. How much suffering she had undergone to raise you to manhood! Know that service to her is your highest duty. But it is quite a different matter if she stands in the way of your spiritual life. Why don't you bring her to me? I shall see what she is like. I may give her a few words of instruction if it may be useful. But beware! Don't involve yourself in worldliness on the plea of serving your mother. After all it is only the

maintenance of a widow. It means only a very trifling sum. Try to settle her affairs as quickly as possible, be it even at a loss. Sri Ramakrishna could never bear the touch of money. You are all out in the world, taking his name on your lips. Always remember his words. Money is at the root of all the disasters you see in the world. Money may lure one's mind into other temptations. Beware!"

* * *

To a young householder devotee

A young householder devotee once spoke somewhat disrespectfully to a Sannyasin. In the course of a talk with the devotee the Mother said: "The Master is very compassionate towards you. Therefore you have felt such a spontaneous attraction for him even from childhood. You must, however, remember these few things and try to carry them out in your life. Be careful about these three things: first, a house situated on the bank of a river; at any time the river may destroy your house and sweep it away in its current. Second, a snake; you must be very careful when you see one, for there is no knowing when it will come and bite you. Third, a Sadhu; you don't know that one word or one thought of his may injure a householder. Whenever you see a Sadhu, you should show him respect. You should not show him disrespect by retorts or slighting remarks." All through his life the disciple cherished these words of the Mother.

To a widowed disciple

The Holy Mother said to a woman disciple after her initiation: "Look here, my daughter, I do not usually initiate a woman who has just lost her husband, but I have made a departure in your case, as you have a spiritual temperament. See that I do not have to repent of it. The teacher suffers from the sin committed by the disciple. Always repeat the sacred word with regularity."

Once the disciple was going to her father-in-law's house, when the Holy Mother gave her the following advice: "Don't be familiar with anybody. Don't take much part in the social functions of the family. Say, 'O mind, always keep to yourself. Don't be inquisitive about others.' Gradually increase the period of meditation and prayer, and read the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna."

Another day the disciple was alone with the Holy Mother. The Mother said to her, "Never be intimate with any man—not even with your own father or brother. What to speak of others then! Let me again repeat, don't be intimate with a man, even if God comes to you in that form."

The Mother forbade the disciple to frequent the monastery and other places where the monks lived. She would say, "You may have no bad intention in your mind. You visit them with pure thoughts. But if your presence brings any impure ideas into their minds, then you will also be partly responsible for it." She forbade her to make pilgrimages without

discrimination of time or company. She asked her to feed a few holy men, if she had the material resources to do so. Pointing to a woman devotee present there, she said, "Look at her. She has learned a great lesson while visiting a holy place." Quoting from a song, she said, "'Pilgrimage and excursion are causes of misery. O my mind, don't be restless about them.' You can attain more in your house, if you are really earnest."

One day some women devotees were criticizing a particular person. The Mother said to the disciple, "Do not lose your respect for her. It was she who first brought you here."

The disciple wanted to adopt a child. The Holy Mother then told her about her own difficulty by taking such a step in regard to Radhu. "Never take such a step," she said. "Always do your duty to others, but love you must give to God alone. Worldly love always brings in its wake untold misery."

* * *

In praise of modesty in women

The Mother was feeling better under the treatment of Syamdas Kaviraj. One afternoon several women devotees came to see her. One of them was particularly bedecked with ornaments and nice clothes. She was a little restless. Addressing them, the Holy Mother said, "You see, the only ornament of a woman is her modesty. The flower feels itself most blessed, when it is offered at the feet of the divine image. Otherwise it is better for it to wither

away on the tree. It pains me very much to see a dandy making a bouquet of such flowers and putting it to his nose, saying, 'Ah, what a nice smell!' Perhaps the next moment he drops it on the floor. He may even trample it under his shoes. He does not even look at it." (It was reported later that a long time before, the husband of that particular woman had left her and gone away for some unknown destination.)

STRAY THOUGHTS

Her responsibility as Guru

Once, on hearing from the Holy Mother that she would pass away soon, a devotee felt much dejected, thinking that he would be helpless after her time. To encourage him she said: "Do you think that even if this body passes away, I can have any release unless every one of those, whose responsibility I have taken on myself, is out of bondage? I must constantly live with them. I have taken complete charge of everything, good or bad, regarding them. Is it a trifle to give initiation? What a tremendous responsibility have we to accept! How much anxiety have we to suffer for them! Just see! Your father is dead, and that at once made me feel worried about you. I thought, 'How is it that the Master is again putting him to test?' That you may come out of this ordeal is my constant prayer. For this reason I gave you all this advice. Can you understand everything I say? If you could do so, that

would lighten my worries to a great extent. Sri Ramakrishna is playing with his different children in diverse ways, but I have to bear the brunt of it. I cannot simply set aside those whom I have accepted as my own."

* * *

Service of great souls and its dangers

Speaking of the transgressions of the attendants serving great souls, the Holy Mother said, "You see, one may commit a fault while serving a great soul. It happens in this way: while he enjoys the privilege of such service, his egotism increases. He then wants to control, like a doll, the person he serves. He wants to boss the latter in everything—eating, sitting or rising. He loses the spirit of service. But why should it be so with those who serve their superiors, forgetting their own comforts and looking upon the latter's pleasure and pain as their own? And you are talking of the downfall of the attendants! Many great souls surround themselves with riches and splendour. This attracts many to come to them as attendants. Such attendants become intoxicated with the enjoyment of their position and so they pave the way for their own ruin. Tell me how many there are who can render service in proper spirit." Then the Mother explained it with a parable. She said, "You see, the reflection of the moon falls on the water of the lake. At this the small minnows jump about in ecstatic joy, thinking that the moon reflected in the water is really one of them. But when the moon sets, they remain as before. After exhausting

themselves in glee, they fall into a state of depression. They cannot understand what it is all about."

* * *

Good works and auspicious time

Once a disciple wanted to take his mother to Banaras on a pilgrimage, but she did not agree to it because the time was not auspicious. He spoke about it to the Holy Mother. In reply she said, "My child, they say that pilgrimage to holy places at an improper time destroys the merit of previous pious acts. But this also is true: One should carry out all pious intentions as early as possible."

The disciple could not grasp the meaning of these statements, which apparently had a twofold significance. Seeing his confusion, she said, "In the opinion of worldly men, it is not proper to visit a holy place at an inauspicious time. It is true that one may put off such a pious intention, considering the impropriety of the time, but death does not make any distinction of time. As none knows when death may come, one should carry out pious intentions whenever the opportunity presents itself, without waiting for a particular time."

* * *

Don't be overconfident

One day a disciple said to the Mother, "Mother, no bad ideas come to my mind." With a start she stopped him and said, "Don't say that. One must not say such a thing."

On false rumour, devotion, etc.

Nalini and some other girls, after some argument, said to the Holy Mother, "Well, aunt, what kind of false rumour (Apavada) is good?" The Mother said, "How can there be good or bad regarding a false rumour?" After a little conversation she said, "But I think a false rumour about wealth is good. If someone is told, 'You are quite rich,' he feels very happy inwardly, however much he may show humility or discomfort outwardly." Then the Holy Mother added, "Well, we have had enough of it. Now can you tell me what one should desire of God?" "Why, aunt," said Nalini, "one should desire for divine knowledge, devotion and such other things that make one happy in the world." The Mother said, "In one word, one should desire of God desirelessness. For desire alone is at the root of all suffering. It is the cause of repeated births and deaths. It is the obstacle in the way of liberation."

* * *

Love, Divine and human

A woman devotee told the Mother about her misunderstanding with a friend. At this the Mother replied, "If you love any human being you will have to suffer for it. He is blessed, indeed, who can love God alone. There is no suffering in loving God."

* * *

An orthodox woman disciple once said to the Holy Mother, "Mother, I was surprised to see the young

widows at your place partaking of dishes prohibited for them in our part of the country. Society objects to it."

Mother: You see, the fact is, these are social matters and they vary in different parts of the country. In our part, young widows are allowed greater latitude in the matter of food and wearing of jewellery. They naturally desire these things. If they are not allowed to eat delicacies publicly, they will eat them stealthily. But in case they are first shown some leniency, and gradually allowed to know that they are doing something against the social injunction, they may give it up of their own accord . . . . But don't let your mind be disturbed over these trivial details. That will make you forget the Master. Whatever people may say, remember the Master and do what you consider to be right. The Master used to say, "Look upon people as worms." But that does not apply to all. It applies only to vilifiers and people of sordid tendencies.

Social customs and spiritual aspirants

* * *

The last time the Holy Mother was at Jayrambati, the Brahmin woman cook came to her at about nine o'clock in the evening and said, "Mother, I have touched a dog. I must bathe." The Mother said, "It is now late in the evening. Don't bathe. It is enough to wash your hands and feet and change your cloth." The cook said, "Oh! that won't do."

Purity

The Mother said, "Then sprinkle some Ganges water on your body." That also did not satisfy the cook. At last the Mother said to her, "Then touch me."

* * *

On vigilance

The Mother once said, "You see, whenever you go from one place to another, observe the things around you, and also keep yourself well informed about what happens in the place where you live. But keep your lips shut."

* * *

On facing difficulties

One day the Mother said to a disciple, "You see, my son, it is not a fact that you will never face dangers. Difficulties always come but they do not last for ever. You will see that they pass away like water under a bridge."

* * *

On good speech

One day at Jayrambati someone used harsh words when speaking to Radhu's insane mother. At this the Holy Mother remarked, "One should not hurt others even by words. One must not speak even an unpleasant truth unnecessarily. By indulging in rude words one's nature becomes rude. One's sensitivity is lost if one has no control over one's speech. The Master used to say, 'One should not ask a lame person how he became lame.'"

Showing respect to all

One morning, while the Holy Mother was rubbing her body with oil, someone was sweeping the courtyard. After the work was done, that person threw the broomstick aside. At this the Mother said, "What is this? You have thrown away the broomstick with such disrespect when the work is done. It takes only the same length of time to put it gently in a corner as it does to throw it aside. One should not trifle with a thing, though it may be very insignificant. If you respect a thing, the thing also respects you. Will you not again need that broomstick? Besides, it is also a part of this family. From that standpoint also it deserves to be treated with respect. Even a broomstick should be treated with respect. One should perform even an insignificant work with respect."

* * *

The sanctity of the head

One day Mini, the pet cat of Radhu, was lying on one side of the courtyard. A woman devotee was caressing it with her foot. Gradually she placed her foot on its head. At this the Mother said to her, "O my child, what are you doing? The head is the place of the Guru. One should not touch the head with the foot. Salute the cat." The woman devotee said, "I never knew that. Today I have learnt a lesson."

THE END

APPENDICES

1. CHRONOLOGY

1. Birth. *22nd December, 1853.*

2. Marriage and first visit to Kamarpukur. *May, 1859.*

3. First visit to Dakshineswar. *March, 1872.*

4. Serving Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, with intervals of visits to Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. *March, 1872 to September, 1885.*

5. Shodasi Puja. *25th May, 1873, according to 'Lilaprasanga', or May, 1872, according to 'Mayer Katha', Vol. II.*

6. First return from Dakshineswar to Jayrambati. *October, 1873.*

7. Death of Ramachandra Mukherjee, the Holy Mother's father. *26th April, 1874.*

8. Severe attack of dysentery and awakening of Simhavahini. *September, 1875.*

9. The incident connected with the 'dacoit father'. *Probably at the time of the third visit to Dakshineswar in 1877.*

10. Serving Sri Ramakrishna at Syampukur and Cossipore. *September, 1885 to August, 1886.*

11. Passing away of Sri Ramakrishna. *16th August, 1886.*

12. First pilgrimage to Brindavan. *30th August, 1886.*

13. Visit to Kamarpukur after returning from Brindavan. *August, 1887.*

14. Return to Calcutta. *1888.*

15. Her spiritual ministry, her time being divided between Calcutta and Jayrambati. *1888—1920.*

16. Performance of Panchatapa. *1893.*

17. First visit to Belur Math. *12th November, 1898.*

18. Passing away of Swami Yogananda. *28th March, 1899.*

19. Passing away of Abhay Charan, the youngest brother of the Holy Mother. *2nd August, 1899.*

20. Birth of Radhu or Radharani, and beginnings of domestic entanglements. *February, 1900.*

21. Passing away of Syamasundari Devi. *January, 1906.*

22. Attending Durga Puja at the house of Girish Ghosh. *1907.*

23. Opening of the Udbodhan Office, the Holy Mother's Calcutta residence. *23rd May, 1909.*

24. Pilgrimage to Rameswaram. *1911.*

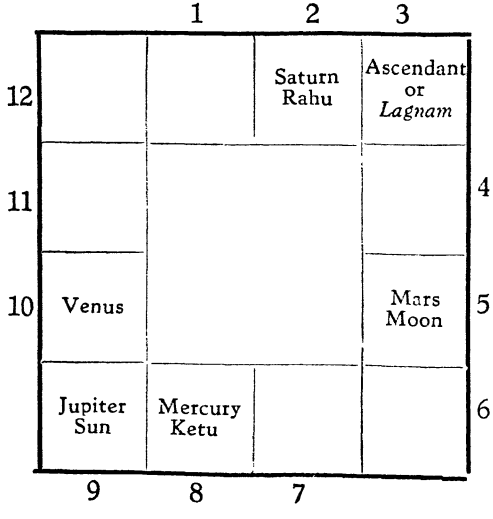
25. Third visit to Banaras. *5th November, 1912.*

26. Beginnings of her last illness. *December, 1919.*

27. Passing away. At 1-30 a.m. on *20th July, 1920.*

2. THE HOROSCOPE OF THE HOLY MOTHER

The following is the horoscope of the Holy Mother as cast by Sjt. Narayana Chandra Jyotirbhushana:



THE NAMES OF THE PLANETS WITH SANSKRIT EQUIVALENTS

Saturn = Sani	Mercury = Budha
Rahu = Rahu	Ketu = Ketu
Mars = Kuja	Jupiter = Guru
Moon = Chandra	Sun = Surya

Venus = Sukra

THE SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC

1. Aries	7. Libra
2. Taurus	8. Scorpio
3. Gemini	9. Sagittarius
4. Cancer	10. Capricornus
5. Leo	11. Aquarius
6. Virgo	12. Pisces

Date of Birth :

8th Poush (Dhanu) 1260, *i.e.*, 22nd December, 1853. Birth at 6.52 p.m. on the 7th day of the dark fortnight, the star being Uttara-Phalguni and the Rasi, Simha. Life began with the period (Dasa) of the Sun, which continued up to 5 years, 11 months and 19 days.

Planetary Position :

Lagnam (Ascendant) is Gemini ; Mars and Moon are in Leo ; Mercury and Ketu are in Scorpio ; Jupiter and Sun are in Sagittarius ; Venus is in Capricornus ; and Saturn and Rahu are in Taurus.

Horoscope :

Mars in Leo, Venus in Capricornus, and Saturn in Taurus confer Raja Yoga. So also Sun and Jupiter in Sagittarius confer Raja Yoga. Hence these planets are very powerful and exert their full influence.

Sun and Jupiter in the 7th house indicate that the husband will be very great and holy, and also show that one will not lead the life of an ordinary householder. Jupiter frees one from the bondage of senses and the Sun makes one great, pure, powerful and Sattvika. These show that one born under such circumstances will have nothing worldly but will rather help the husband in his spiritual life.

Sun with Jupiter, being in the house of Jupiter, aspect the Ascendant (Lagna), and Mars is aspected by Jupiter. These indicate extraordinary self-control, purity of character, and strength of will.

Mercury and Ketu show simplicity, austerity and concentration.

3. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books in Bengali:

1. *Sri Sri Ramakrishnalilaprasanga*: By Swami Saradananda. In five parts. Published by the Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.

This is the most authoritative biography of Sri Ramakrishna. It gives much valuable information on the Holy Mother's association with Sri Ramakrishna.

2. *Mayer Katha*: Being the conversations of the Holy Mother as recorded in the diaries of several disciples. In two volumes. Published by the Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.

Besides giving the Holy Mother's teachings, these conversations give much valuable biographical material in her own words. The main body of these conversations has been published in the second part of this book, while the biographical material has been made use of in the first. The conversations as appearing in the second part have been much abridged. For our plan of abridgement, see the Preface to the whole book.

3. *Sri Sri Sarada Devi*: By Brahmachari Akshayachaitanya. First Edition. Published by Bhattacharya and Sons Ltd., 19 Shyamacharan Dey Street, Calcutta.

This book of 313 pages, though recently published, has the distinction of being the first complete biography of the Holy Mother to appear in any language. It has chronicled a large body of

biographical facts and worked out the chronology of the whole life. But it is lacking in sense of discrimination and fails to distinguish betweeen the essential and the non-essential in using facts gathered even from doubtful authorities.

4. *Sri Sri Mayer Jivan Katha* : By Sri—Published in the Bengali weekly *Desh*, Vol. V, (1938), Calcutta.

This anonymous serial appears in about fifteen issues of the weekly during the year 1938. Though the writer's name is not published, he seems to have had access to many first-rate authorities and cites the evidence of the Holy Mother's intimate companions like Yogin-Ma and others. The writer seems also to have moved closely with the Holy Mother. Though it is not a complete or systematic biography, it sheds much light on periods of her life, especially on her life at Kamarpukur after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, of which little was known before.

Books in English :

There are no original or comprehensive writings in English on the Holy Mother. *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, published by the Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, gives the substance of Swami Saradananda's account contained in the *Lilaprasanga.* In Sister Nivedita's *The Master as I saw Him* and in Sister Devamata's *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples* and *Days in an Indian Monastery*, one gets glimpses of the Holy Mother's personality as it appeared to the

two Western Sisters in their close association with her.

In the third edition of this book, we have incorporated some more interesting and revealing information about the Mother's life, taken from the Centenary Memorial Volume entitled *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, by Swami Gambhirananda. This well-documented biography was originally written in Bengali as a Holy Mother centenary publication and soon after rendered into English by the author himself and published by the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, in 1955.

INDEX AND GLOSSARY

ABHAYA CHARAN : the fourth brother of the Holy Mother, he was the husband of Surabala and the father of Radhu, 89, 139, 239.

Abhedananda, Swami : a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, also known by his pre-monastic name, Kali, 11.

Adbhutananda, Swami : a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, also known by the pre-monastic name of Latu, 111, 253.

Advaita : philosophy of non-dualism, its chief exponent being Sankaracharya.

Advaitananda, Swami : a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, also known by the pre-monastic name of Gopal Senior, 228.

Akshay : a nephew of Sri Ramakrishna.

Akshay Kumar Sen : a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the author of a poetical biography of the Master in Bengali, called *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*, 202.

Altekar : the author of the book *Woman in Hindu Civilization*, 14.

Amjed : a Mussalman labourer, 204.

Amodar : a river at Jayrambati, 3.

Amrul : a kind of green, supposed to be beneficial in dysentery.

Analogy : of
angler 528; birds 334; calf 505, 524, 533; crabs 194; elephant with golden cover for tusk 544; fish 536; foodstuff 500; fragrance 535; letter 521; moon 49; minnows 555; new moon and full moon 532; sleeping man 534; snake 521; sun's rays 508; wind 521.

Annapurna : the image of the Divine Mother in the temple of Viswanath at Banaras, 235, 237.

Arambag: a place on the way from Calcutta to Jayrambati, 97.

Aratrika: a form of service in a Hindu temple, the chief feature of which is the waving of lighted wicks and incense before the image, 157, 344, 404.

Ashrama: any centre of service, study or meditation; a retreat; a monastery.

Atman: the Divinity in its individualized state as the soul.

Ayodhya: a place of pilgrimage in North India, reputed to be the birth-place of Sri Rama, 111.

Ayurveda: the old traditional system of Indian medicine, which is still widely practised, 285, 372.

BABURAM: see 'Premananda'.

Bagh Bazar: a locality in Calcutta where the Udbodhan Office, the Calcutta residence of the Holy Mother, is situated, 351.

Balaram Bose: a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, 108, 229, 441.

Banaras: the holiest of all places of pilgrimage for Hindus, situated in the Uttar Pradesh of India and noted for the temple of Visvanath. Holy Mother at, 112, 230, 234, 481, et seq.: sanctity of, 517; virtue of dying at, 483 et seq.

Banerji: a Brahmanical family name special to Bengal.

Barada Prasad: the third brother of the Holy Mother, 89, 134, 138.

Belur Math: the head monastery of the Ramakrishna Order near Calcutta, 229, 238-9, 368, 392; Durga Puja there, 244-6.

Bhagavad Gita: a great Hindu scripture noted for its universal teachings.

Bhagavata Purana: a Vaishnavite scripture dealing with the traditions and philosophy of Bhakti or love of God.

Bhakta: a follower of the path of Bhakti or devotion; devotee.

Bhakti: devotion; love of God. See, 'Holy Mother, her teachings on devotion'.

Bharata: a famous ing of ancient India from whom the land derived the name of Bharatavarsha.

Bhaskarananda, Swami: a reputed Sannyasin of Banaras, 112.

Bilva: a kind of fragrant leaf used in worship and specially sacred to Siva, 142, 485.

Bodh Gaya: a place in the U.P. where Gautama, the Buddha, attained illumination. Holy Mother's prayer there for the consolidation of the monastic Order, 216, 228.

Brahma: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva constitute the trinity of Pauranic Hinduism (doctrines based on the Puranas as distinguished from the Vedas). Viewed in the light of their functions, they represent the creative, preservative and destructive aspects of the Divinity. Though they are represented as having different personalities in the Puranas, it is also emphasized always that they constitute the one Godhead. Brahma is to be distinguished from Brahman, the Impersonal Absolute.

Brahmacharya: the state of a Brahmacharin.

Brahmacharin: a celibate student undergoing mental and moral training under a preceptor in the old Hindu style; a novice in a Hindu monastery, preparing for the life of a monk.

Brahmakunda: a sacred region in the Ganges at Hardwar.

Brahman: the Impersonal Absolute, the path of, 521.

Brahmananda, Swami: a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, also known by the pre-monastic name of Rakhal, 65, 166, 236, 245, 326, 367, 374, 384.

Brahmani: the familiar name of Yogeswari, the ascetic Brahmin woman, who instructed Sri Ramakrishna in the mysteries of Mother-worship.

Brihadaranyakopanishad: one of the principal ten Upanishads or philosophical treatises of the Vedas. It is one of the highest authorities on Vedanta philosophy, 86-7.

Brindavan: a place of pilgrimage, considered the holiest by the Vaishnavas of the Radha-Krishna cult, 111, 112.

Brinde: a maidservant at Dakshineswar in the days of Sri Ramakrishna, 52, 384.

Bull, Mrs. Ole: an American disciple of Swami Vivekananda, 206, 247, 438.

Butchery: 502.

CALF: and the athlete, 533.

Chaddar: a garment used for covering the upper part of the body.

Chaitanya: a great medieval religious teacher of India, who taught the philosophy and practice of passionate love of God, centering round the cult of Radha and Krishna; also consciousness.

Chatterji: a Brahmanical family name, special to Bengal, 17, 19, 425.

Chameli Puri: a celebrated Sannyasin of Banaras, 236.

Chandra Devi: Sri Ramakrishna's mother, 18, 19, 63.

Chapati: Indian bread, made of wheat flour flattened into round disks and baked in fire, 64, 65.

Child: and the nature of God, 431, 458.

Cossipore: a suburb of Calcutta where Sri Ramakrishna stayed for treatment and passed away, 104 et seq.; the sacred association and sanctity, of the garden house at, 490.

Crabs: see Analogy.

DAKSHINESWAR: the suburb of Calcutta wherein is situated the Kali temple of Rani Rasmani, in which Sri Ramakrishna stayed for the greater part of his life.

Dandi Sannyasin: a monk carrying always a sacred staff as a part of his vow, symbolic of knowledge, 220.

Death: in illness without proper expiation, 496; life after, 435; a play to a great soul, 363.

Deoghar: a place of pilgrimage and health resort in Behar, midway between Calcutta and Banaras, 111.

Devi: literally, feminine of Deva, meaning Goddess. It is also a common termination of feminine names, as Sarada Devi, Chandra Devi, etc.

Dharma: morality; duty; religion. Dharma (morality), Artha (wealth), Kama (pleasure) and Moksha (liberation) are regarded as the four supreme values of life (Purusharthas).

Dream: reality of, 501; world compared to, 445.

Durga: an aspect of the Divine Mother, 548.

Durga Puja: the great autumnal worship of the Divine Mother, 239, 332, 368, 395.

ETERNAL FEMININE, The: 256 et seq.

European lady: curing the daughter of a, 398 et seq.

FAKIR: a Muslim ascetic, 368.

Fingers: and Japa, 432, 531, 533.

GADADHAR: the name by which Sri Ramakrishna was known in his boyhood, 121.

Gadai: shortened form of Gadadhar, 121.

Ganges, The: an important river of North India, having its source in the Himalayas. The Hindus consider it very sacred and look upon it as a goddess. Sprung from the feet of Vishnu (God), its waters spread like a natural sacrament, washing off the sins of all who bathe in it with faith. Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother held it in great reverence, and while in Calcutta, they generally stayed close to its banks. Sanctity of, 122, 503.

Gaurdasi: the same as Gauri-Ma, this being the term by which the Holy Mother addressed her, 143, 232, 262, 338. See 'Gauri-Ma'.

Gauri-Ma: a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a companion of the Holy Mother, 72, 122, 289, 305, 328, 329; an account of, 260 et seq.; Holy Mother's estimate of, 262, 337; her reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna, 319; also known as Gaurimani, 122.

Gaya: an important place of pilgrimage where Hindus from all parts of India go to perform the obsequies of their ancestors, the belief being that rites performed there release the souls of the dead from all obstructions to higher evolution, 228, 393, 435, 436, 437.

Gayatri: a sacred vedic mantra that has become the common prayer of the Hindus, especially of the higher castes, 232.

Geruva: ochre colour of the cloth worn by Sannyasins.

Ghosh: a family name of a certain caste in Bengal.

Girish Chandra Ghosh: the greatest of Bengali dramatists and an ardent householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, 135, 243-4, 313, 314 et seq., 359, 459, 460; his mystic experience about the Holy Mother, 187, 188; Durga Puja at his house, 243-4; sister of, 243, 372, 373.

Girls: education of, 13 et seq.

Gita, the Bhagavad: the great Hindu Scripture.

Godavari: a river flowing right across the Deccan, 234.

Golap-Ma: a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a companion of the Holy Mother, 68, 70, 71, 102, 111, 121, 125, 126, 127, 176, 197, 251; account of, 255 et seq; purity of her mind, 503, 504.

Gopal Senior: a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, otherwise known as Swami Advaitananda, 65.

Gopala: a name of Sri Krishna, especially in his aspect as a young boy.

Gopaler-Ma: an old woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, 66, 263.

Gopi: a milkmaid of Brindavan loving Sri Krishna as her sweetheart, 113.

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, The: See the 'Kathamrita' and 'Master Mahashay', 357, 359.

Grace: compared to sun's rays, 503; and past actions, 458; and yearning for God, 426; and realization, 430, 444, 445.

Gupta: a family name of Bengal, indicating a particular caste.

Guru: ideal of, 164, 165, 174; mind as, 536; his right to test a disciple, 174; and validity of knowledge, 424.

HAMSA: a swan; figuratively a holy man, as in Paramahamsa, 215, 453.

Hamsi: feminine of Hamsa, 215.

Hardwar: a holy place of great fame, situated in the U.P. in North India. A large number of Sannyasins live there. It marks the place where the Ganges begins to flow into the plains, 118.

Hari: a name of Vishnu.

Harish: a devotee, 219.

Harivallabh Bose: a brother of Balaram Bose, 229.

Hatya: a form of penance, 93.

Holy Mother, her life: birth and childhood, 7; education, 8, 9; marriage, 12 et seq.; first visit to Dakshineswar, 23 et seq.; visions, 28; uniqueness of her married life, 34 et seq., 37, 47 et seq.; 84 et seq.; initiation, 50; spiritual practices, 44; experiences of deep meditation and Samadhi, 50, 53, 54, 113, 116, 118, 129, 130; life at Dakshineswar, 51, 63 et seq.; attack of dysentery, 92; spleen enlargement, 94; complaint of her mother about her having no children, 35; daily routine of life at Dakshineswar, 66 et seq.; about her wearing ornaments, 73, 74-5; at Syampukur and Cossipore, 104 et seq.; fasting at Tarakeswar, 106; pecuniary difficulties, 120, 122, 123; sufferings at Kamarpukur, 121 et seq.; and Harish episode, 219; spiritual ministry, 128, 129, 161 et seq., 247, 252, 348; performing Panchatapa, 128; and Mohammedan dacoits, 203; police vigilance on her village home, 250-1; prayer for the welfare and strength of the monastic organization, 216, 228, 229; photographed by Mrs. Sarah Ole Bull, 438; curing the daughter of a European lady, 398; examples of being worshipped, 180, 244, 245, 321, 329, 395, 396; seeing her in dream, 447; daily routine and habits in later days, 222 et seq.; income and expenses, 247; way of making food offering to the Master, 210 et seq., 443, 444; cause of her physical suffering, 166, 167, et seq., 350; assuming the sins of devotees, 165 et seq.

susceptibility to the touch of impure souls, 166 et seq., 361, 481; last illness and passing away, 284 et seq.; message, 270 et seq.

—her pilgrimages: to Brindavan, 111 et seq.; Allahabad, 118; Gaya and Bodh Gaya, 228; Banaras, 111, 234, 459 et seq.; Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram of Banaras, 235; Sarnath, 236; Puri, 229, 230-1; Rameswaram, 232-3; Bangalore, 234; Belur Math, 238.

—and Bhaskarananda, 112; Chameli Puri, 236; Girish Ghosh, 188, 243, 313 et seq.; Yogananda, 117, 240, 241.

—and her relatives: relation with brothers, 134 et seq.; attachment for Radhu, 140 et seq., 496; snapping the attachment for Radhu, 290-1; examples of troubles from relatives, 135, 136, 137-8, 141, 142-5, 250, 387, 414, 418, 419, 471, 494, 495, 501; relatives contrasted with devotees, 421; meaning of her domestic entanglements, 147 et seq.

—and Sri Ramakrishna: her stay with him, 34, 57 et seq.; his love and respect for her, 36, 37, 70, 71 et seq., 76 et seq., 81, 208; her training under him, 47 et seq.; his worship of her, 40 et seq.; his special instruction to her, 49, 55, 146; her service of him, 62, 103, 104 et seq.; her acceptance of his ideal of life, 37, 83-4; her post-mortem experiences of him, 108, 112, 114, 116, 118, 122, 125, 210, 444; her reminiscences of him, 22, 24, 29, 35, 36, 59, 61, 67, 68, 72, 73, 75, 77, 104, 106, 136, 146, 313, 325, 345, 346, 352, 353, 359, 363, 364, 374, 384, 386, 390 et seq., 393, 438 et seq., 451, 452, 459, 461, 465, 469, 470, 476, 496, 498, 508, 536, 547.

—her personality: physical features, 196, 197 et seq.; spirit of independence, 78 et seq.; sympathy for even the erring, 69, 79, 80, 203; example of courage, 97 et seq., 217 et seq.; freedom from fault-finding nature, 115, 479; Yogin-Ma's vision about her immaculate purity, 154; absence of egotism, 213; sense of her own divinity, 213, 318, 337, 408, 409; intellectual qualities, 214, 215;

liberality as spiritual teacher, 169 et seq.; insight into spiritual future of disciples, 182 et seq.; manner of initiation, 90, 307, 310, 311, 349, 350; extreme consideration for devotees, 174 et seq.; devotees subjecting her to inconveniences, 178 et seq., 370, 379, 447, 448, 462, 463; patience and forbearance, 180, 457; catholicity as teacher, 181; kindness and love, 201, 202, 203, 204, 342, 397, 419, 494; seeing good even though evil, 312, 313; power of detachment, 157, 158; life offering consolation to householders, 501; ideal of womanhood, 263 et seq.; and Madonna ideal, 269; sense of motherhood, 79, 277; motherly principle in her, 148 et seq., 164 et seq., 200, 201, 207, 248, 263 et seq., 288, 293, 488; mission in life being manifestation of motherhood, 77, 207; model life, 275-6, 416.

–her teachings on

Banaras, dying in, 517; Brahman, knowledge of, 521; breathing exercises, 512, 513, 515; ceremonial purity, obsessions regarding, 479, 503; charity, 215, 425; concentration, 499; Cossipore garden, sanctity of, 490; cult side of, 273 et seq.; cultural side of, 274 et seq.; deities and angels, 452; desire and salvation, 454; desires, binding and otherwise, 473; desires and rebirth, 428; devotion, 337, 417, 425, 428, 444, 524, 547; devotion and caste rules, 341; divine grace, 354, 430, 445, 458, 468, 508, 522, 533 et seq.; divine images, sanctity of, 481; divine protection, 474, 531; divine service in the shrine, 343; duties, sanctity of, 527; economic habits, 348; evolution, speeding up of, 455; facing difficulties, 559; faith and book-learning, 521; fault of others, not finding the, 292; financial dependence on others, dangers of, 146; food, purity of, 491; food of Sraddha ceremony, 491; food, rules regarding, 491, 499; forbearance as the highest virtue, 482; forbearance in women, 331; forgiveness, 479; girls, education and marriage of, 317, 335; giving everyone his due, 349; God alone deserves the heart's

love, 557; God, feeling Him as one's own, 423, 444, 445, 458, 468; God, immanence of, 377; God, longing for, 524; God, resignation to, 522; God, supremacy of His will 435; God, yearning for, 425, 464; good speech, 559; Guru, 164, 165, 174, 346, 352, 424, 448, 463, 530, 536; Guru, responsibility of, 173, 174, 554; habit, 509, 542; habit, power of, 533; head, sanctity of, 560; holy places, visits to, 553; illness, doing penance for, 496; image worship, 333; initiation, necessity of, 411: Ishta Devata and Sri Ramakrishna, 497; Isvarakotis, 415, 453, 461; Japa, 381, 432, 499, 509, 511, 512, 514, 521, 525, 527 et seq., 535 545 Kali, the Mother, 478; Karma, law of, 434, 458, 476, 477, 544; Karma, spiritual practice mitigates the effect of, 544, 545; Kundalini, awakening of, 513, 516; life after death, 435; life, aim of, 517; life of renunciation and its glory, 537, 538, 539; lust and passions, control of, 521; making food-offering, 546, 547; man of knowledge, state of, 504; married life, self-restraint in, 364, 385, 538; married life, spiritual practices in, 346, 385; Mantra and ritualistic worship, 546; meditation, 337, 514, 518, 535; meditation and Samadhi, experiences of, 51, 54, 112, 114, 118, 129, 130; mind, purity of, 411, 427, 479, 503, 504; mind, weakness of, 531; modesty as the ornament of women, 553; monastic ideal, 384; monastic institution, conducting, a, 216; monastic life, 429; monasticism versus household life, 191 et seq., 537, 551, 552; Nirvana, 452, 453; non-attachment, 473; non-duality, 437; over-confidence, danger of, 556; parents, duty to, 548, 549; pilgrimages, 513, auspicious time for, 556; prayer, 506, 507, 530; prayer and meditation, danger of leading an exclusive life of, 525, 526; prayer to Sri Ramakrishna for relief in distress, 547; for attainment of devotion, 547, 548; purity, external and ceremonial, 482, 503; Ramakrishna Order, activities of the, 472, 526; realization, 53, 55, 381, 382, 423, 424, 425, 430, 457, 458, 468, 504, 505, 508; reasoning, limitation of, 424; renunciation

193, 423; resignation, 522; respecting all, 560; sanctity of, 504; Sannyasa, are sex and caste bars to ?, 492, 493; Sannyasa and Sannyasins, 191 et seq., 517, 537, 538, 541 et seq.; Sannyasin's duty, 506; Sannyasins, necessity of respecting the, 551; scholarship, limitation of, 521; scriptures and their value, 487; self-surrender and spiritual disciplines, 510, 536; service of great souls, its dangers, 555; sins, absolution from, 436, 456; sins, confession of, 357; sinners, redemption of, 455, 456; Siva, worship of, 482, 548; souls, kinds of, 478; spiritual aspirants, impatience in, 506; spiritual aspirants, scholarship as ornament in, 543; spiritual fall, cause of, 519; spiritual life, earnestness in, 523; spiritual practice, 51-2, 402, 403, 412, 425, 434, 504, 507, 513, 520, 535; spiritual practices in solitude, 514, 518; spiritual practices, youth as the proper time for, 510; spiritual progress, 492, 534; spiritual progress, difficulty of recognizing, 534; spiritual progress, worldliness as obstruction to, 508; Sraddha, salvation etc., 429, 430, 435, 436, 437; Sri Ramakrishna, 83, 84, 181, 408, 411, 424, 438, 443, 444, 450, 465, 480, 489, 490, 497, 498, 500, 506, 508, 522, 536, 543, 545 et seq.; Sri Ramakrishna, disciples of, 461, 490; Sri Ramakrishna, identity of herself with him, 337; Sri Ramakrishna, worship of, 519, 527, 545, 546, 548; suffering, problem of, 356, 432, 468; Tapasya, need of, 488; touching her for purification, 558, 559; truth, 545; unconscious state, death in, 459; vigilance, 559; visions, unimportance of, 519; wealth, allurement of, 549 et seq.; work, 324; work and worship, 472, 515, 517, 525 et seq., 527; world, dreamlike nature of, 445; worldly life, spiritual progress in, 523; worldly things, illusoriness of, 376; Yogic postures, 515; young people, need of leniency in dealing with, 558.

Hriday: a nephew of Sri Ramakrishna who constantly attended on him during the period of his austerities, 78, 94 et seq.

ISHTA DEVATA: the form or aspect of the Deity one specially selects for devotional purposes; Chosen Ideal, 497.

Ishta Kavacha: amulet pertaining to one's Chosen Ideal, 112.

Isvarakoti: a soul perfect at the very birth and born only for the good of humanity unlike others who are born to work out their own salvation, 415.

JAGADDHATRI PUJA: a special worship of the Divine Mother in one of Her aspects, known as Jagaddhatri, 90, 91.

Jagannath: literally, Lord of the Universe, but the word is specially used to denote the Deity of the great temple at Puri, 229, 230.

Japa: silent repetition of a divine Name or an occult formula, keeping count either with a rosary or fingers. This kind of repetition occupies an important place in the Hindu system of spiritual practices. See 'Holy Mother, her teachings on Japa'. See also 'Fingers'.

Jayrambati: the Holy Mother's native village. Famine at, 5; Mother's temple at, 293-4.

Jnana: spiritual knowledge; spiritual illumination.

Jnani: a follower of the path of knowledge.

KALI; the Mother of the Universe, 479.

Kalidasa: the greatest of Sanskrit poets and dramatists, well-known for his drama, the *Sakuntala*, 12.

Kali Kumar: the second brother of the Holy Mother, often referred to as Kali, 89, 134, 136, 138.

Kalipada Ghose: 76.

Kali Puja: a special worship of the Divine Mother as Kali.

Kali Yuga: the last of the four long ages of Hindu mythology, namely, Krita, Treta, Dvapara and Kali. Their order of succession is according to the degree of degeneration of spirituality and righteousness in them. The present age

is Kali, the most degenerate, and, owing to the general, lowering of standards in it, even a little spiritual practice is supposed to lead to great results, 545.

Kalmi greens: 38.

Kalpa: an age or cycle of vast duration according to the computation of the Puranas.

Kalpataru: the celestial tree of Hindu mythology, which gives all that one happens to desire under it, 522.

Kamarpukur: the birth-place of Sri Ramakrishna, situated about 60 miles to the north-west of Calcutta.

Karma: actions in general; specially applied to the accumulated results of the actions of previous birth, 434; and belief in God, 476, 477; can be mitigated by devotional practices, 476; and Divine will, 434.

Kathamrita: a book recording the conversations of Sri Ramakrishna. Its author Mahendra Nath Gupta, known more familiarly under the pen-name of 'M', kept a diary of the Master's conversations, and published them later in Bengali under the name *Kathamrita*. It is one of the source books on Sri Ramakrishna, and has now been translated into English under the name of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 357, 359, 383.

Kausalya: mother of Rama who is regarded as an incarnation by the Hindus, 14.

Kedarnath: a place of pilgrimage in the Himalayas, specially sacred to Siva, 235.

Khichuri: a preparation of rice, pulses, vegetables and spices, all boiled together, 6, 121.

Khoka: the pre-monastic name of Swami Subodhananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, 173.

Koalpara: a village on the way to Jayrambati, 157, 201, 215, 543; Koalpara Ashrama, 249.

Krishna, Sri: one of the greatest of incarnations whose exploits are sung in the *Bhagavata* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Bhagavad Gita* is supposed to be words of Sri Krishna, 113.

Kundalini: the spiritual power of man lying dormant at the base of the spinal column. Rousing of, 281, 346, 403.

LAHA: a rich family of Kamarpukur, 125.

Lakshmi: a niece of Sri Ramakrishna; commonly known as Lakshmi-Didi (sister Lakshmi), 8, 9, 65, 341, 438; an account of, 263

Lakshmi: a name of the Divine Mother in Her aspect as the consort or female counterpart of God Vishnu or Narayana, 213, 412.

Lakshminarayan, 83, 215.

Lalit Babu: a householder disciple of the Holy Mother, 418, 419, 425, 480.

Latu: see 'Adbhutananda'.

Leela: sport; used also to denote God's creative activity, for, according to Hindu philosophy, the whole cosmic activity is the sport of God, 476.

Luchi: flour flattened into disks and fried in ghee, 384.

MADONNA: ideal of, 269.

Madhavacharya: otherwise known as Vidyaranya. He was an epoch-making figure in the history of Indian philosophy after Sankaracharya. He is the author of several commentaries and treatises which reveal his encyclopaedic knowledge.

Madhura Bhava: literally 'the attitude of sweetness'. In the devotional philosophy it means a form of Divine love in which the devotee looks upon the Deity as his sweetheart. The most noteworthy example of it is the love of Radha for Sri Krishna. The philosophy of this form of love has been expounded in great detail by Sri Chaitanya and his followers.

Madura: a great and ancient city of South India, forming the centre of Tamil Culture. It is noted for its great and wealthy temple of the Divine Mother, known as Meenakshi.

Mahabharata: a great Indian epic of encyclopaedic size and range. It has been one of the most dominant influences on Indian Culture, 48, 311, 312.

Mahamaya: one of the names of the Divine Mother, signifying Her function as the cosmic Illusionist.

Mahapurushji: a familiar name of Swami Shivananda, a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. His pre-monastic name was Tarak, 503.

Maharaj: a term of respect, especially applied to members of Holy Orders.

Mahayana: a wide-spread form of Buddhism, also known as Northern Buddhism, noted for its theistic spirit and wonderful humanism.

Maheswara: literally means 'supreme Godhead'; specially applied to Siva, 78, 498.

Mahendra Nath Gupta: See 'Master Mahashay'.

Maku: a niece of the Holy Mother, 137, 146, 157, 242, 421, 537.

Mantra: a divine Name or occult formula used for continuous repetition by spiritual aspirants; also sacred texts chanted at the time of rites and worship, 232, 448.

Manu: a great law-giver of ancient India, whose great work, the *Manu Smriti*, has been a dominating influence in Hindu law and code of morality.

Marriage: in girlhood, 12 et seq.; in early Aryan society, 13.

Master, The: an honorific name for Sri Ramakrishna.

Master Mahashay: the familiar name for 'M' or Mahendra Nath Gupta, the author of the *Kathamrita* in Bengali whose English translation is well known as *The Gopsel of Sri Ramakrishna*. He was a prominent householder disciple of the Master 111, 359.

Mathur: a son-in-law of Rani Rasmani and her successor as the proprietor of the temple of Dakshineswar. He was a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and took upon himself the duty of looking after all the wordly needs of the Master, 29, 73, 439.

Mistress : 312.

Moon : as uncle of all children, 49.

Motherhood, The principle of : its manifestation in the Holy Mother, 77, 149, 163, 164, 174, 181, 207, 265.

Mrinmayi : an image in a temple at Vishnupur. Literally means an image made of earth ; contrasted with ' Chinmayi ', 420.

Mussalman : a follower of the Islamic or Mohammedan faith, 368, 502.

NAG MAHASHAY : a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, 321, 322, 462,

Nahabat : the small building to the north of Dakshineswar Kali temple, where the temple orchestra used to play at stated hours. The Holy Mother was accommodated in this building while living at Dakshineswar.

Nalini : a niece of the Holy Mother, being the daughter of her brother, Prasanna Kumar, 137, 146, 204, 242, 416, 417, 421, 478, 502, 503.

Nanak : a medieval Indian teacher of devotional philosophy. He is the founder of Sikhism, and his teachings are noted for their high monotheism and rejection of caste.

Narayana : a name of Vishnu, the second of the Hindu trinity. See ' Brahma '.

Naren : the pre-monastic name of Swami Vivekananda. See ' Vivekananda '.

Nera : a child of Maku, one of the nieces of the Holy Mother, 157.

Nilmadhav : 241.

Niranjan : the pre-monastic name of Swami Niranjanananda, a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, 104.

Nirvikalpa Samadhi : the experience in which consciousness attains to subject-objectless state.

Nivedita, Sister : the monastic name of Miss Margaret Noble, an English disciple of Swami Vivekananda, 206, 214, 315, 316.

Nivedita Girls' School : 254.

Nyasa : a rite forming part of worship, its chief feature being the touching of various parts of the body, accompanied by the utterance of Mantras. It signifies the identification of the worshipper's limbs with those of the Deity.

PANCHATAPA : a form of austerity, 128.

Panchavati : a group of five trees at Dakshineswar, 40.

Pandit : learned scholar in any branch of Hindu learning ; a Brahmin.

Panihati : a place near Calcutta closely associated with Sri Chaitanya. A great religious festival is held every year at this place and the Master used to visit it on those occasions, 215.

Parasara Samhita : the code of law and socio-religious observances according to the sage Parasara, 13.

Parsi : a small religious and racial community in India, who follow Zoroastrianism. They are the descendants of old immigrants from Persia who were forced to leave their homeland owing to Muslim persecution. Now they are a small but very flourishing community in India, 14, 170.

Payasam : rice cooked in milk boiled down to the required consistency and sweetened.

Pice : a quarter of an anna. Sixteen annas make one rupee, the Indian Currency unit, 146.

Pranayama : exercises for the control of the vital energies through the control of breath.

Prasada : food or anything else that has been offered to the Deity. Devotees consider it sanctifying to partake of it.

Prasanna Kumar : the eldest brother of the Holy Mother, 89, 125 ; his wife's death, 242.

Prasannamayi : a respectable elderly woman of Kamarpukur, who was a friend of Sri Ramakrishna in his boyhood days, 125, 126.

Premananda, Swami: a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, also known by the pre-monastic name of Baburam, 166, 230, 245, 305, 361 et seq., 369.

Puja: worship, ceremonial adoration. Durga Puja, Kali Puja, etc., are Pujas or worships of the Deity in those particular aspects.

Purana: a series of voluminous religious literature, consisting of 18 texts and dealing with a variety of subjects like devotional themes, philosophical disquisitions, histories of royal dynasties, legends regarding the exploits of God and heroes, cosmology, geography, and, in fact, every form of knowledge that was known to the ancients. Their interest, however, is primarily devotional, and their very remarkable achievement consists in the way in which they have given a spiritual orientation to the whole field of human achievements and thought. They have been the most potent influence in Hindu life and thought.

Purdah: seclusion of women, 60.

Puri: a famous place of pilgrimage for the Hindus, where the temple of Jagannath is situated, 229, 230-1.

Purity: depends on mind, 479.

Purna: a young disciple of the Master, whose spiritual potentialities were regarded as very high by the Master and whom he classified as an Isvarakoti, 461.

Purnabhisheka: the highest initiation according to Tantras, corresponding to Sannyasa of the Vedic tradition, 259.

Purnananda: 50.

RADHA, RADHIKA: the great woman contemporary and devotee of Sri Krishna, God incarnate, who loved Him as her sweetheart. Her love, being untainted by the least touch of worldliness, has been accepted in Hindu devotional literature as the highest expression of the longing of the human heart for the Divine, 113, 418.

Radharamana: a name of Sri Krishna, meaning the lover of Radha, 115.

Radhu: a niece of the Holy Mother. Her full name was Radharani; but she used to be called either as Radhu or Radhi. The posthumous daughter of the Holy Mother's fourth brother, she was her ward in a special sense, 139 et seq., 141 et seq., 150 et seq.; Holy Mother snapping the attachment for, 290-1.

Radhu's mother: see 'Surabala'.

Raghuvir: a name of Sri Rama, meaning the hero of Raghu's line. Raghu being a famous King of ancient India mentioned in the Puranas. It was the name by which the image of Sri Rama in Sri Ramakrishna's ancestral home was known, 413.

Rajahmundry: an ancient city on the banks of the Godavari between Madras and Calcutta, 234.

Rakhal: see 'Brahmananda'.

Rama, Sri: one of the great Incarnations, as popular and widely worshipped as Sri Krishna. The great Indian epic, the Ramayana, commemorates his exploits, 432, 433.

Ramachandra: the Holy Mother's father, 4 et seq., 27, 88.

Ramakrishnananda, Swami: a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, known also by his pre-monastic name of Sasi, 232, 233,

Ramakrishna Punthi: a metrical work on Sri Ramakrishna by Akshay Kumar Sen, 202, 415.

Ramayana: the great epic by Valmiki on the life and exploits of the divine incarnation, Sri Rama.

Ram Datta: a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna also referred to as Ram Babu and Ramachandra Datta, 63, 111.

Rameswar Chatterjee: elder brother of Sri Ramakrishna, 19.

Rameswaram: a great all-India centre of pilgrimage situated in South India and noted for its Siva temple, 232-3.

Ramlal: a nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, 65, 79, 96, 123-4, 125, 288, 452.

Ramnad, Raja of: Ramnad used to be a principality in the southernmost region of India in pre-British days. Now

the Rajas are there; but they have no ruling powers. The particular Raja referred to in the book was a devotee of Swami Vivekananda, 233.

Rasagolla: a Bengali sweetmeat made of the solid portion of coagulated milk and sugar, 169.

Rasmani, Rani: the foundress of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, Calcutta.

Ravana: the ten-headed Monster King of Lanka who went to war with Sri Rama.

Rishi: one who has evolved enough to see or realize spiritual truths.

Rishikesh: and God-realization, 506.

SACHCHIDANANDA: a formula indicating Brahman and meaning Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

Sadhana: means of attainment; especially applied to practices for spiritual realization.

Sadhu: a holy man; a Sannyasin in general.

Saiva: a worshipper of Siva.

Sakta: a worshipper of Sakti.

Sakti: power; especially, Divine creative power, conceived as the Mother of the universe or Female Divine Principle.

Sakuntala: a famous Sanskrit drama by Kalidasa, 12.

Salagrama: a small, round stone emblem of Vishnu used for worship, 230.

Samadhi: a general term for different forms of spiritual absorption, 439, 452.

Sambhu Mallik: a householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, 61, 92.

Sandesh: an Indian sweetmeat made with the casein of milk.

Sankaracharya: the great Vedantic teacher of India who established the dominance of non-dualistic philosophy, 218, 230.

Sannyasa: monastic life. Duty in the life of, 511; Holy Mother's attitude to, 191 et seq.; sex and caste, are they bars to?, 492, 493; vanity of, 429.

Sannyasin : a monk.
Saptasati : a text of 700 verses in Sanskrit in glorification of the Divine Mother, held in very great reverence among devotees, 221, 261.
Sarada : the maiden-name of the Holy Mother. See 'Holy Mother'.
Saradananda, Swami : a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna also known by his pre-monastic name of Sarat, 127, 135, 170, 204, 246, 251, 287 ; an account of, 253-5.
Saradeswari Ashrama : an educational institution for girls started by Gauri-Ma, 260-1.
Sarala : a girl disciple of the Mother who tended her in her last illness, 286, 287, 290.
Sarat : see 'Saradananda'.
Sarasvati : an aspect of the Divine Mother, specially looked upon as the presiding deity of knowledge, 73, 76.
Sarnath : the site of an ancient Buddhist monastery and seat of learning, near Banaras, 236.
Savitri : a famous Vedic Mantra which has become the common prayer of the Hindus ; also known as Gayatri.
Sari : a kind of female vestment common in India, 413.
Scriptures : the extent of their usefulness, 521.
Shivananda, Swami : 245 ; See 'Mahapurushji'.
Shodasi Puja : worship of the Divine Mother as Shodasi, a young woman being often adopted as the symbol of the Divine Mother. For datailed explanation, see pp. 43, 386.
Simhavahini : the Mother Deity of a temple at Jayrambati ; literally, the Mother with the lion as her vehicle, 93.
Sita : the wife of Rama and the heroine of the epic Ramayana. She is considered the ideal of Indian womanhood, 58, 73.
Siva : the third of the Hindu trinity, 230, 482, 483, 495, 516.
Smriti : codes compiled by great sages on tradition, morality, law, administration, etc. In general all scriptures other than the Vedas are also called Smritis.
Spirits : of the dead, 374 et seq., 428.
Spiritual progress : is gradual, 492, 530, 532.

Sraddha : the periodical funeral rites of the Hindus consisting chiefly of offering of food and water to the manes and spirits of the dead in general, 429, 435, 436, 437 ; eating the food of, 491, 499.

Sri Ramakrishna : complexion of, 441 ; food offering to, 442, 443 ; vision of, 449 ; cause of his special appeal to men, 490 ; crucial test, subjecting himself to, 32 ; predictions about his passing away, 105-6 ; demise of, 108 ; devotees of his never suffer from want of food, 489 ; disciples of, 366, 367 ; divinity of, 408, 409 ; early history of, 17, 18 et seq. ; Holy Mother, his attitude towards the, 29, 30, 72-3, 76-7, 82 ; Ishta Kavacha of, 112 ; realizing him as ' one's own ', 424 ; and redemption of mankind, 411 ; relics of, 109, 110 ; his remarks on the Holy Mother, 36, 37, 38, 40, 63, 78, 79 ; reminiscences of (see ' Holy Mother, reminiscences ') ; truth of his words, 520 ; womankind, his regard for, 34 ; worship of, 337, 390, 391, 519 ; worshipping his own picture, 438.

Story : of Narada and initiation, 411, 412 ; of the priest of the temple of Govinda, 428 ; of Rama, Sita and suffering, 432, 433.

Sudhira, Sister : a disciple of the Holy Mother. She was in charge of the Nivedita Girls' School, 264.

Suka : a great sage of ancient India, traditionally described as the son of Vyasa, the compiler of the Vedas, 506.

Surabala : an insane sister-in-law of the Holy Mother, referred to also as ' Pagli ', mad woman, crazy sister-in-law, etc. She was the wife of the Holy Mother's youngest brother, Abhay Charan, and the mother of her pet niece Radhu, 139 et seq., 316, 414, 417, 493, 495.

Suren Mitra : a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami : a title indicating a Sannyasin and meaning ' master '.

Swadeshi Movement : 250-1.

Syamasundari Devi : the mother of the Holy Mother, 6, 89, 123, 125, 126, 135, 242-3.

Syampukur : a suburb of Calcutta where Sri Ramakrishna stayed for treatment for sometime during his last illness, 102, 104.

TANTRA : a vast body of literature in Sanskrit dealing with psychology, philosophy, rituals, observances, worship of Deities, magical rites, etc., all in relation to the rousing of man's psychic powers or expanding his consciousness into Divine Consciousness.

Tapasya : austerities. And Divine grace, 533 ; forgiveness as, 477, 482 ; truth as, 545.

Tarak : the pre-monastic name of Swami Shivananda, 173.

Tarakeswar : a place on the way from Jayarambati to Calcutta, 97, 106.

Tilbhandeswar : the image of Siva in a temple at Banaras, 235.

Totapuri : the great Sannyasin who initiated Sri Ramakrishna into Sannyasa and the practice of the disciplines of non-dualistic philosophy, 33, 236.

Trailokya : the son of Mathur Babu and his successor as the proprietor of the Dakshineswar Kali temple, 96.

Trigunatita, Swami : a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, also known by the pre-monastic name of Sarada, 253.

Trivarga : the three mundane values of life : virtue, wealth and pleasure ; and the Dandi Sannyasin, 221.

UDBODHAN OFFICE : the Holy Mother's Calcutta residence, so called because the *Udbodhan*, the Bengali magazine of the Ramakrishna Order, is published from there, 127, 246 ; Car Festival at, 329.

Uncle Moon : 49.

' Uncles ' : 136.

Upanayana : investiture with the sacred thread, incumbent on Hindus of the three higher castes, 14.

Upanishads : the philosophical sections in Vedic literature, dealing with problems relating to soul, God, Nature, human destiny and the like. They are in a sense the basis of all Hindu philosophy, especially of the Vedanta system, 86.

VAIDYANATH : a Siva image of Banaras, 235.

Vaishnava couplet : 76.

Vaishnava Tantra: the scriptures of the Hindu sect called Vaishnavas or Vaishnavites, meaning worshippers of Vishnu, 122.

Vasuki: a legendary serpent of great prowess, 254.

Veda: the principal scripture of the Hindus in archaic Sanskrit and constituting the world's earliest literature, 259.

Vedanta: the most important and influential system of Indian philosophy, based on the Upanishads and Badarayana's Aphorisms, 253, 424, 451.

Victoria, Queen: 205.

Viraja Homa: sacrificial ceremony relating to passionless state. It is a simple Vedic rite preparatory to one's entering the life of Sannyasa, and consists in throwing oblations into the sacred fire with the chanting of certain inspiring Vedic texts indicative of renunciation, 259.

Vishnu: God as the preserver of the Universe enumerated as the second person of the Hindu trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, 230.

Vishnupur: a place of pilgrimage which is also a district town in Bengal. It is about eighty miles from Calcutta and is the last railway station for one travelling from Calcutta to Jayrambati, 231.

Visions: are unimportant, 519.

Visvanath: God of the universe, but specially denotes the Deity, Siva, of Banaras, 112, 516.

Vivekananda, Swami: the foremost of Sri Ramakrishna's sannyasin disciples, known also by the pre-monastic name of Narendra Nath Datta or by the still shorter term Naren, 65, 108, 131, 239, 347, 479; his experiences as a wandering monk, 367 et seq.; his giving salvation to spirits, 375; and institutions for disinterested work, 526; his vision of Sri Ramakrishna, 449.

Vyasa: an ancient sage of legendary fame to whom is attributed a huge body of Hindu sacred literature, including the great and voluminous epic, the *Mahabharata*. He is also identified with Badarayana who founded the Vedanta

philosophy as a system by embodying its teachings in a set of aphorisms called Vedanta Sutras, 507, 509.

WOMANHOOD : the essential principle of, 265 et seq.

YAJNAVALKYA : a great philosopher of the Upanishads ; also a law-giver of later times, 14.

Yama : the name of a law-giver of olden days.

Yantra : ritualistic diagrams of the Tantras, possessed of great occult significance.

Yatra : a traditional devotional dramatic performance of Bengal.

Yogananda, Swami : a Sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, also known by his pre-monastic name of Yogen, 51, 90, 121, 253 ; an account of, 240-41 ; his demise, 241 ; his initiation by the Holy Mother, 117, 118.

Yogen : see ' Yogananda '.

Yogin-Ma : a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a lifelong companion of the Holy Mother. Her full name was Yogindra Mohini Biswas, but was called by the Holy Mother as Yogin. This name is to be distinguished from the identical name by which Swami Yogananda was familiarly known after his pre-monastic name of Yogindra. To distinguish it from that of Yogin Ma, we have spelt it as ' Yogen '. The Holy Mother distinguished him by adding the epithet of ' son ' to the name. An account of, 258 et seq,, 333 ; her reminiscences of the Holy Mother, 52, 73, 114, 115, 116, 127, 153-4, 360.

Yogin : see ' Yogin-Ma '.

ZAMINDAR : a person holding land under a special tenure called Zamindari right ; a landlord, 259.